

TEMPING FATE: CAN UNIONS ORGANIZE TEMP WORKERS?

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THE ALTERNATIVE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

FALL BOOKS

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Individualism in America

Jim Sleeper
Black success stories

Bonnie Smith
Rousseau and his legacy

Phyllis Eckhaus
Suffrage revisited

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Reality bytes

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EDITORIAL

POLICE RACISM AND MEDIA BLIND SPOTS

Shocking. The voice of a rogue cop. An aberration. Those were the initial responses of media observers to the taped remarks of LAPD Detective Mark Fuhrman concerning African-Americans and the way they should be treated. Listening to Fuhrman's racist views as they were aired in the O.J. Simpson trial on August 29 was certainly painful, especially for African-Americans, but what proved truly shocking was the disingenuous media response, even by the more responsible parts of the press. The *New York Times*, for example, told us—on page one—two days after the tapes were played, that it's "impossible to say with any certainty whether [Los Angeles Detective Mark] Fuhrman's remarks reflect those of a bigoted element in the police department." And the *Chicago Tribune*—under a page-one headline, "Experts cite improvements in race relations"—lamented that the widely publicized playing of the tapes fueled "perceptions," especially among African-Americans, that racism and the planting of evidence are pervasive in big-city police forces.

Thus, even while decrying Fuhrman's undeniably racist comments, these worthies were attempting to cast doubt on what every black person knows, and what everyone else should know. Indeed, Los Angeles is notorious for its racist police force—and for the protection superiors in the force extend to cops on the beat. After the Rodney King case, in which Los Angeles cops were filmed beating King mercilessly, the Christopher Commission, appointed to investigate the incident, found that some 15 percent of the force were hardcore racists, and it took 23 pages to document the extent and virulence of the

LAPD's racism and sexism.

And the Los Angeles police are far from alone in their racist contempt and violent conduct toward minority communities. Just this year we've had a stream of reports of police brutality and corruption in other cities. In Philadelphia, officers have pleaded guilty to planting drug evidence, stealing money from innocent people and falsifying arrest reports. As a result, some 40 convictions have been reversed, and hundreds more are being reviewed. In New York, similar cor-

ruption has been exposed in the Harlem and Bronx precincts. And in New Orleans a gang of police has taken up arms against the African-American community. One officer has already been charged with murdering three people, including a fellow policeman, and another is a suspect in other killings.

In the face of all this, police spokespeople and academic experts across the country argue that overall police performance on racial issues is better than it has ever been. In almost every major city the number and proportion of black, Hispanic and women officers has increased in the last decade, they argue. Police are better-paid and better-educated. Police shootings of civilians, bullets fired by officers and other abuses of police power have all declined, according to specialists in the field.

But assuming all this is true, why cite it now? What purpose does this serve other than to divert the public's attention from the meaning of Fuhrman's revelations?

Police departments have always played two roles. They protect us from crimes against ourselves or our property, and just about everyone is grateful for that. But they also function as agents of social control, and it is in that role that they have been magnets for racists. Not too long ago the explicit role of the police in the South was to keep blacks from organizing in their own interest, just as it was the job of police in the Southwest to keep Mexican-Americans and Indians in their place. And throughout our history, the police have been assigned to keep working and poor people from organizing and fighting for their rights.

In these communities, police have normally been seen as an occupying force, just as they are now seen in the ghettos of Los Angeles and other major cities. And for good reason. Yes, thanks to the struggle for civil rights, there has been great progress in the public understanding of how police should behave, even in the poorest communities. But even so, the attitudes and habits—and perhaps even the private agendas—of most police forces are changing all too slowly, as members of minority communities know full well.

The supposed good news of the experts about improvements in recent years tells us nothing about how good things are; they only allow us to imagine how bad they were. So let us acknowledge Mark Fuhrman as representative of large sectors of our police departments and deal with him and them accordingly. ◀

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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InTHESETIMES

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LETTERS

Atomic threat

People like Studs Terkel ("Remembering the good war," *ITT*, August 7) say the real reason for dropping the atomic bomb on Japan was to intimidate Stalin. So what was wrong with that? Without the threat of the bomb, Stalin might have seized all of Europe by 1950. Maybe some people are disappointed that did not happen....

A. Auerbach
Oracle, Ariz.

A Good War

Contrary to Studs Terkel's claim (*ITT*, August 7), what the Smithsonian's Enola Gay exhibit "originally had in mind" was not "something very simple; to show the effects of the bomb." It was, unhappily, the imposing of a highly dubious viewpoint.

Find me one veteran of the war in the Pacific who didn't shudder at these words in the Smithsonian's proposed text: "For most Americans, this war was fundamentally different from the one waged against Germany and Italy—it was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western imperialism." In or out of context, those are acutely stupid and embarrassing words. Reading that proposed text, I was sorely tempted to tell the Smithsonian's scholars that we got a close-up look at the "unique culture" of Imperial Japan in the Philippines, and what we saw would have pleased Japan's Nazi allies. The dear old American Legion (which threw me and a whole post of other lefties out of the organization in 1946) will have to make a little room in its brass bed for me on this one.

As to the anniversary to-do about the dropping of the bomb: Like Terkel, I admit to some shame in failing to feel

horror or anguish at the thing we had done. But the question of whether the bomb was necessary to save lives is far less simple than Terkel makes it.

There is no evidence, hard or soft, that "the Japanese were already on the verge of surrender," as Terkel argues. The only real historical evidence on the thinking of the Japanese decision-makers just before Hiroshima—the minutes of high-level meetings—shows that the views of the top military command were dominant. They were prepared to fight to the end. How many American (and Japanese!) dead would that have meant? Revisionist theories half a century after the fact can't gainsay the military reality that the Japanese had two divisions on Okinawa and more than 20 divisions waiting for us in Japan, plus a rather fanatical civilian population.

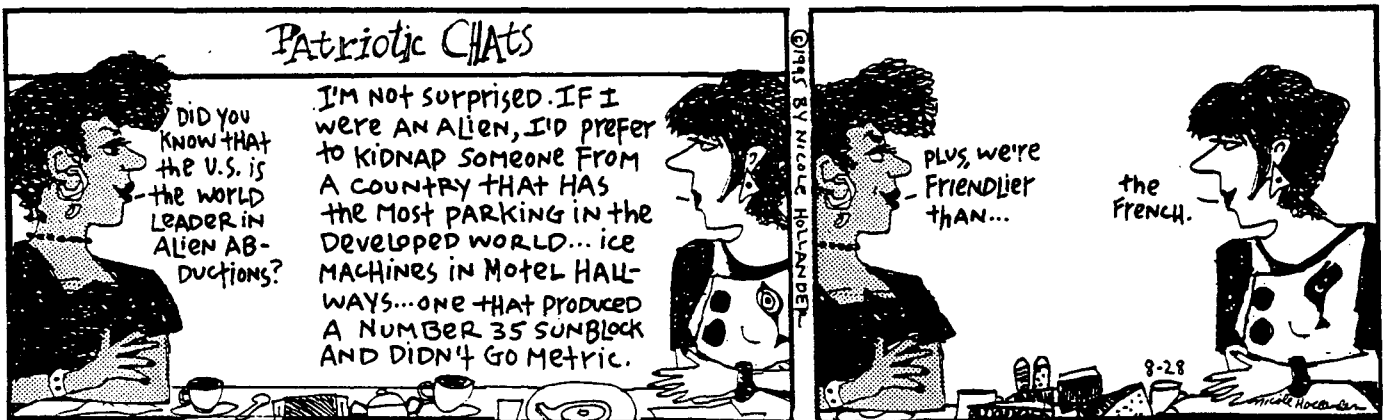
For Terkel, the good cause of peace and anti-nuclear reason has unfortunately beclouded the realities of the war that had to be won.

Lester Rodney
Walnut Creek, Calif.

Editor's note: There is a great deal of evidence that the Japanese were on the verge of surrender. Unfortunately, it was kept from the American people at the time and has only recently seen the light of day in the published research of some historians, most notably in Gar Alperovitz's new book, The Decision to Use the Bomb. Japan was hopelessly defeated, its cities destroyed, its air force decimated, its navy sunk.

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



And Japanese leaders, including the emperor, were making efforts to arrange an end to the war before the bomb was dropped. From their point of view, the main sticking point was retaining the emperor as an institution, which American demands seemed to threaten. In the end, even after the bomb was dropped, this was agreed to by the United States.

Talk about Stalin seizing all of Europe is based on ignorance of the degree of devastation in the Soviet Union and Stalin's essentially defensive ideology. In fact, when the Italian Communists were on the verge of taking power in Italy, they were ordered by Moscow to refrain and instead to support a non-Communist government. Stalin also undercut the Communist insurgents in Greece. The last thing Stalin wanted was postwar turmoil and possibly rival Communist regimes in the more advanced countries of Western Europe.

Home wrecker

In his zeal to paint affordable housing policies and programs in California as little more than a front for developers' greed, Jeff Elliott ("California schemin'," *ITT*, June 26) has painted a one-sided picture that would have benefited from closer fact-checking and interviews with community-based nonprofits and affordable-housing advocates.

The low-income housing tax credit, for example, (available only for rental housing, and therefore never intended to assist the poor to buy homes, as Elliott implies) is indeed a tax subsidy for wealthy investors. But it has also enabled nonprofit groups to develop hundreds of thousands of well-designed and well-managed apartments for low-income households.

If the Kemp Commission used NIMBYism as an excuse to call for a massive reduction in environmental and planning controls on development, it is nonetheless the case that opposition by middle-class homeowner groups to

affordable housing has become so vocal and well organized that, even in "progressive" Berkeley, a proposal by a local nonprofit to rehabilitate a long-vacant store to provide housing for people with AIDS was rejected.

As for California's housing element requirements, Elliott fails to note that a central purpose of the housing element is to require all cities within a given region to provide their "fair share" of housing for the poor, rather than leaving the task to the central cities alone. Housing element reform is badly needed, and a broad coalition of groups has been working for several years to improve the process. Elliott's diatribe, however, only provides support for those localities that would like to "self-certify" their compliance, thereby escaping their obligation to provide affordable rental housing. (Incidentally, Elliott's claim that housing element approval is required to receive federal housing funds applies only to smaller cities that are ineligible for direct federal assistance and must instead apply to the state for a share of federal monies.)

Elliott cites unnamed "critics" who charge that the federal HOME Program "overlooks more urgent needs such as temporary shelter for the homeless," but fails to mention that HOME was intended specifically to provide permanent housing. All of the funds must benefit low-income households, and 90 percent of the rental assistance must benefit households with incomes below 60 percent of median income. Elliott cites the slow rate of commitment of fiscal year 1992 HOME funds, but fails to mention that the program was seriously flawed in its first year or two; recent changes to the program have led to a significantly higher commitment rate.

It is unfortunate that *In These Times* has seen fit to publish a piece that aids those who would further dismantle the housing safety net. Next time, please try to include the voices of those who are struggling to make decent affordable housing a reality for all.

Janet Falk
Chair, Housing California
Sacramento, Calif.

Elliott replies: Many communities and organizations in California work hard to provide decent affordable housing. But while housing advocates have noble intentions, the motives of their allies are not always so pure. Laudable goals are sometimes exploited by builders looking for a gimmick to win project approval, and it has also become a popular excuse for politicians seeking to undermine environmental protection and regional land-use control.

In California, the "fair share" allotments are dictated from the state Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), which sings the tired conservative lament that "overregulation" is the root of all problems. Supporting its views with data from the right-wing Claremont Institute, the department has delayed construction of affordable housing for years, as it did in Santa Barbara County. Although Falk concedes the HOME program was sluggish in 1992, the delays were mainly in California; almost all other states performed better.

Towns or cities that self-certify do so only as a last resort. Most have spent years wrestling with HCD, submitting draft after draft. They do so not to escape their obligation to provide affordable housing; they do it because it is the only means to complete their General Plan, which is the blueprint for the future of their community.

Rarely is NIMBYism the obstacle to affordable housing in California; the problem is gamesmanship by those who put political agendas ahead of providing help for the needy. Ultimately, it becomes another way of cynically exploiting the poor for profit's sake.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

InSHORT



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MY COUNTY, 'TIS OF THEE

On July 4, 1994, as officials from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) scrambled to get out of the way, Richard Carver, a Nye County, Nev., commissioner, drove a bulldozer onto federal land and began opening a road that the feds had closed. Carver's Independence Day drive may have struck some as odd, but the Nye County commissioner is much more than an eccentric local pol. He is a leader of the county rights movement, a largely Western-based group of ranchers, miners and loggers who are challenging federal ownership of public lands.

Over the last few years, Nye County and several dozen other Western counties have passed ordinances claiming jurisdiction over federal lands. Carver explained in a recent interview that his road-building effort was "very carefully staged and planned ... to force the bureaucrats to come after us." Carver got his wish. In March, the Justice Department filed suit against Nye County, and the case is being closely watched both by friends and foes of the county rights movement.

The activities of Carver and his compatriots have focused attention on a murky world where county rights groups, the militia movement and right-wing think tanks intersect. A key group within the county movement, the Utah-based National Federal Lands Conference, published an article in its October 1994 newsletter titled, "Why there is a need for the militia in America." And Carver admits that he has addressed gatherings of Jubilation,



Don't worry, be unhappy

After the Ku Klux Klan proposed holding a rally in the town of Elkhorn, Wis., to "address pertinent issues of concern to white Christian Americans," local officials decided they had to stand up



and forthrightly denounce the politics of hate. Well, sort of. After one local voter com-

plained about the term "hate group" in the Walworth County Board's official resolution, the board changed the wording to refer instead to "unhappy groups," the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* reports. The KKK is "not a hate program," Lake Geneva Supervisor Frank Janowak explained, defending the action. "It's more or less people that are unhappy with what's going on, and they don't necessarily hate. ... I don't think that you should really use the word 'hate' in a close community like Walworth County."

Lion kink

A Christian group called the American Life League has taken up arms against what it sees as some of the most perverted polluters of public morals: *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*. By

carefully watching recent Disney animated films, Reuters reports, researchers for the Virginia-based anti-abortion organization claim to have discovered, among other things, a minister in *The Little Mermaid* showing signs of



"obvious sexual

arousal," as well as a mysterious voice in *Aladdin* whispering, "Good teenagers, take off your clothes." The group has some support for its claims: Arch Campbell, an NBC film critic in Washington, says he, too, noticed the word "sex" written in the sky in a single frame of *The Lion King*—though he suspects the word reflects not a sinister Disney plot to undermine teen morals, but a prank played by bored animators that no one watching the film normally would ever have noticed.

Men are from Mars

Complaining that men are unjustly oppressed in today's society—"absent from the books we read our children," and mocked in TV sitcoms as "buffoonish and stupid"—members of California's Men and Women for Gender Justice recently asked the Sonoma



County Board of Supervisors to set up a commission on men—only to be turned

down, for a second time, by the all-male board. Joe Manthey, a substitute teacher from Petaluma and founder of the organization, attributes the board's action to anti-male bigotry. "They are five white males, so they are vulnerable to the radical feminist backlash," Manthey told the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

a white supremacist organization. But Carver passionately denies holding racist views. "I will speak to anyone who invites me," he said. "I don't do a background check." County rights groups are also wielding a favorite militia weapon: elaborate legal threats. Soon after Carver's bulldozer incident, Ted Angle, the BLM area resource manager in Tonopah, received a letter challenging the bureau's right to administer public lands. Jim Sweeney, a Justice Department spokesman, says the county has been receiving "bum legal advice." According to Sweeney, "the lands in question in Nye County are clearly U.S. land. They have been for nearly 150 years. The federal government owns the lands and has the right to manage them for all Americans."

But Nye County's counsel in the federal case, the Individual Rights Foundation (IRF), feels differently, arguing that the U.S. government's control over vast stretches of Western land effectively denies the region's states sovereignty rights guaranteed them by the Constitution. The IRF is a legal arm of the Los Angeles-based Center for the Study of Popular Culture (CSPC), the think tank founded by lapsed leftist David Horowitz. The foundation is also representing Otero County, N.M., in a federal land-control lawsuit.

In Washington, congressional Republicans, in their latest giveaway to corporate America, are pushing legislation that would remove 270 million acres of land from federal control. "All of us have the same goal," Carver said. "We're communicating and strategizing with some of our congresspeople." When asked if the IRF receives corporate funding for its county rights cases, John Howard, the attorney in the Nye County case, flatly dismissed the idea. Howard said the IRF relies on the philanthropies that fund the CSPC, and insisted that none of them has "any interest in timber, minerals [or] might benefit" from a legal victory. (The CSPC receives substantial support from high-profile conservative funders such as the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation and the John M. Olin Foundation.)

But even as the IRF has helped the county supremacists plot legal strategies, illegal acts have been tarnishing the movement's image. Early this spring, three weeks after the government filed suit against Nye County, the National Forest Service office in Carson City, Nev., was bombed. And early last month, just hours after the first hearings were held in the Nye County case, a bomb destroyed a van belonging to the Forest Service official in charge of the Carson City office. No one has claimed responsibility for either blast, but many share the suspicions of Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV), who said the second bombing has revealed "the ugly underbelly of the county supremacy movement."

—Jane Hunter

CAUCASIAN DANGERS

If Russia's increasingly aggressive neo-fascists have their way, upcoming parliamentary elections—scheduled for December 17—will be dominated by just one issue: the internal threat posed by Caucasian and Asian minorities to the country's white, Christian civilization. Although classical anti-Semitism is rife on Russia's hard-right fringe, Caucasians and Asians—who are more numerous than Russia's Jews and politically more vulnerable—have become the scapegoat of choice for Russian nationalists.

"Caucasian people swarm into our cities to take advantage of our superior economy and Russian tolerance," says Nikolai Lysenko, an independent ultra-nationalist deputy of the Russian parliament. "It is necessary to install a tough regime of control over them, or they will overwhelm our historic Russia."

This view is increasingly echoed in the streets of large Russian cities, where,

three years after the onset of market reform, life seems meaner, dirtier, poorer and more crime-ridden than ever. Ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy won 23 percent of the vote in 1993 parliamentary elections, in part by blaming Caucasians for Russia's post-Soviet woes. In particular, Caucasians are widely implicated in the explosion of crime that has paralyzed Russian society and stymied economic revival.

Decades of relatively free migration during the Soviet era left significant communities of mainly Muslim Caucasians and Asians living in urban centers across Russia. And their ranks have been swelled by an influx of refugees from the ethnic wars in the south that followed the collapse of the USSR. Many of these new migrants live on the streets and survive by begging or theft; others have become prominent in Russia's infamous organized crime clans. But ethnic Russians themselves bear equal blame for organized crime, experts agree. A more compelling reason for scapegoating Caucasians and Asians in post-Soviet Russia is their considerable entrepreneurial success, according to Alexander Liberman of the Union of Councils, a human rights group. "In these difficult economic times they make a tempting political target for demagogues," Liberman explains.

President Boris Yeltsin's nine-month-old war against independence-minded Chechnya has also played into the hands of those who would blame Caucasians as the source of Russia's problems. While only a handful of ultranationalist politicians openly advocate mass expulsions of Caucasian people, Russian officials have occasionally taken actions that come disturbingly close. After Chechen commandos stormed the Russian town of Budyonnovsk in June, a wave of pogroms against local Chechens began. Police in Stavropol Territory, where Budyonnovsk is located, reportedly arrested and expelled hundreds of Chechens after recent rallies by Cossacks and other right-wing groups demanded that action be taken to curb the "threat within." Earlier, in the wake of Yeltsin's 1993 clash with the former parliament, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov ordered "undocumented" Caucasians deported from the city. During a two-week state of emergency, some 10,000 refugees and market vendors were rounded up and driven out of Moscow.

"Surveys showed those deportations were hugely popular with the public, though there is no sign that forcing out all those Caucasian people decreased crime," says Andrei Kolganov, a political scientist at Moscow State University. "As long as the economic depression continues in Russia, the idea of punishing one ethno-religious group will remain attractive to many people. There is a real danger that politicians who believe in this kind of solution could come to power one day. And then, God help us all." —Fred Weir

THE AIDS EXPORT BUSINESS

The lending policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are speeding the transmission of AIDS in developing countries, according to a controversial article published last May in the London-based academic journal *AIDS*. The article's authors, Peter Lurie of the University of California-San Francisco, Percy Hintzen of the University of California-Berkeley and Robert A. Lowe of the University of Pennsylvania, contend that the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) pushed by the two agencies force developing nations to promote urbanization and export-based economies while chopping spending on health care and other social services so they can repay their debts.

SAPs, which allow developing countries to secure new loans, typically lead to currency devaluation and curbs on consumption for the citizens of borrowing countries, the article argues. Goods become more expensive, while person-

MEDIA BEAT

By Jennifer Gonnerman

Contrarian conservatives

In recent months, left-liberal journalists at *The Nation*, the *Village Voice* and *In These Times* have lamented the pathetic percentage of minorities in their ranks. Their right-wing counterparts, meanwhile, have been crowing about their own diversity. In July, the *Wall Street Journal* plugged five new conservative minority publications in an editorial titled "Black conservatives take to the presses." Though "the existence of black conservatives is not news," the editorial noted, "never have there been so many black-controlled [media outlets] for these contrarians."

It remains to be seen whether this rise in minority magazines reflects a concurrent jump in conservatism among African-Americans. But there is no denying that the publications profiled by the *Journal* are providing important new venues for minority writers. Perhaps the most prominent of the publications profiled is *National Minority Politics*, a Houston-based monthly magazine. Editor Gwen Daye Richardson, who is African-American, says her publication is needed because "Jesse Jackson doesn't speak for all black people." Richardson, an entrepreneur, started the for-profit publication with her husband in 1988. Originally launched as a newsletter, *National Minority Politics* was relaunched as a magazine in 1993. With an emphasis on "individual responsibility" and "limited government," the magazine's political philosophy sounds a lot like the Republicans' Contract with

America.

The circulation of *National Minority Politics* jumped 25 percent to 10,000 after the GOP's January takeover of Congress. New momentum has also come from the latest crop of African-American Republicans, particularly presidential contender Alan Keyes and first-term Oklahoma Rep. J.C. Watts, who are among the magazine's favorite subjects. The magazine has also received strong support from conservative leaders, who have embraced it as yet another forum for their message.

In June, House Speaker Newt Gingrich attended a roundtable with African-American journalists sponsored by *National Minority Politics*. The event attracted attention when Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) later denounced some of Gingrich's comments as racist. *National Minority Politics* later ran a story praising the Speaker's performance.

Another GOP heavyweight who promotes the magazine is Gary Bauer, head of the Family Research Council, a "family values" group. Bauer not only authored a story in the magazine's September issue, his group also bought full-page ads in the magazine's last six issues.

Richardson envisions her publication as far more than a political tool, however. "We really want the magazine to be a major political publication like the *New Republic* or the *National Review*," she says. In the meantime, the magazine is already starting to play a key role in diversifying the ranks of right-wing journalism. Says Richardson, "I have seen writers [of ours] in the *National Review* that weren't in there before."

al income and consumption taxes increase. Perhaps their most significant consequence is to force signatory nations to emphasize export production, which tends to be concentrated in urban areas or densely populated work settlements where transient laborers from surrounding areas are employed.

AIDS is more prevalent in densely populated areas, which increases these workers' risk of infection. Many workers return to their hometowns, bringing the disease with them. And because of health budget cuts, those towns are hard-pressed to cope with the spread of AIDS. By the year 2000, according to the World Health Organization, 90 percent of all HIV infections will have occurred in developing countries.

Having reviewed a copy of the article prior to publication, Robert Feachem, the Bank's senior adviser for the population, health and nutrition department, sent a terse letter to *AIDS* editor Anne Johnson, advising her not to publish it. *AIDS* gave the Bank an opportunity to respond to the article in the journal's August issue. In an unsigned reply, the Bank asserted that Lurie and his colleagues must be opposed to all development, because it inevitably brings people together, which spreads disease. The Bank also accused the article's authors of caring only about AIDS, over and above the poverty of the general population, which development seeks to alleviate.

World Bank officials point out that they don't order the governments of borrowing nations where to make budget cuts. But Philip Musgrove, a principal economist at the Bank, acknowledges that the first round of cuts initiated under a SAP tends to be across the board or, worse, in health and education programs. Lurie contends that the agencies are shirking their responsibility by giving loans to developing countries without preventing them from making such predictable and wrongheaded budget cuts.

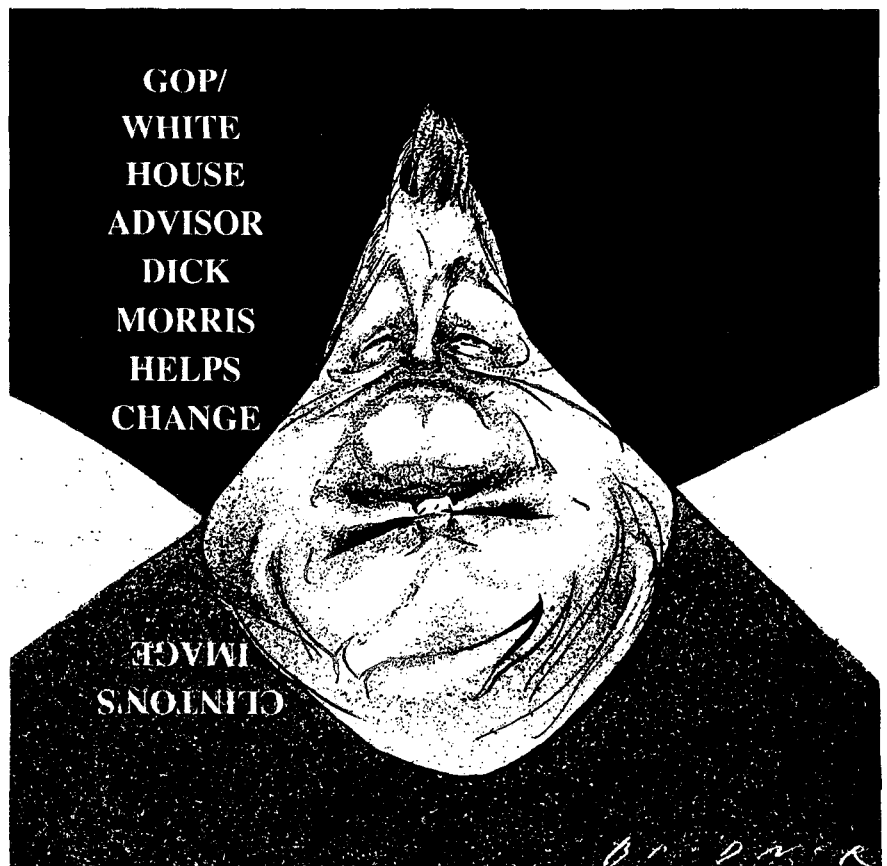
—Shawn Neidorf

Tomorrow's News Tonight

By Steve Brodner

GOP/
WHITE
HOUSE
ADVISOR
DICK
MORRIS
HELPS
CHANGE

TO WHI
S. NOIN TO





ROM WARRIOR

Ceija Stojka fights for recognition of Europe's Rom

When it was first published in Austria seven years ago, Ceija Stojka's *We Live in Secrecy: Memoirs of a Rom Gypsy* had an unexpected effect on that country's

Rom minority: It encouraged many to reveal their ethnic background for the first time. Even in post-Holocaust Central Europe, historical prejudices about gypsies as thieves and liars have lingered, and concern about losing a job or not getting an apartment understandably led many Rom to hide their identity. The February murder of four Austrian Rom, who were killed by a pipe bomb, shows there is physical danger as well.

Nevertheless, the "coming-out" that began with Stojka has not stopped in the wake of such terrorism. "There is anger rather than fear," she says during an interview in Vienna. Stojka charges Austrian authorities with foot-dragging in investigating right-wing violence.

Today, as never before, Stojka and others are challenging age-old prejudices against the Rom people. Why, they ask, are the Rom considered alien when it's been more than five centuries since their ancestors migrated to Europe from India? Rather than idealizing the Rom subculture as an exotic world unto itself, Stojka's memoirs describe the ways in which Rom culture has been influenced by and integrated into the broader culture. In describing Rom life before World War II, she stresses her family's acceptance in the peasant villages they traveled through selling horses and textiles. But their integration was cultural as well as economic. Her family took part in the pilgrimages to shrines of the Madonna, which are an important feature of Austrian Catholicism. Even gypsy music—considered a preserve of cultural specificity if there ever was one—is an ever-changing form, constantly affected by mainstream influences such as rock and jazz.

But in the Nazi era, the Rom, like the Jews, found out how precarious their relationship to the larger society was. Estimates of the number killed then range considerably, in part because the Nazi definition of "gypsy" included any itinerant, Rom or not. In Stojka's extended family of some 250 people, only six survived the war.

As a "gypsy" child under Nazi rule, Stojka was forbidden to go to school.

ETC.

By Joel Bleifuss

Sooeey!

The defense appropriations bill, soon to become law, serves some extra slop to the U.S. weapons industry. The latest giveaway is a federally insured loan program for arms merchants known as Defense Export Loan Guarantees. These new guarantees are designed to encourage arms purchases by countries that are not creditworthy enough to participate in the four already existing arms sales programs. The government—in exchange for a fee from U.S. weapons manufacturers—promises to cover any losses incurred by the companies should countries fail to complete payments on their weapons purchases. Congress has committed to cover up to \$15 billion in bad weapons debts. The program, a creation of arms industry lobbyists and their congressional retainers, was opposed by both the White House and the Pentagon.

On August 3, Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-AR) gamely took to the Senate floor to try to defeat the proposal. "You are looking at something that has the potential for a mini S&L [scandal]. We just got through writing off \$7.1 billion to Egypt and \$300 million to Jordan," said Bumpers. "Now, the arms merchants are hot for this, and I do not blame them. How would you like to be able to sell \$100 million worth of weapons to some Third World nation—where 50 percent of the people are starving to death—for a little simple fee you pay on the front end?"

This giveaway would not have passed the Senate with-

whose mere names tend to activate the gag reflex: Sam Nunn, Daniel Inouye, Joseph Lieberman and Dianne Feinstein. (The last two, in fact, took to the floor to defend the guarantees.) According to "The Best Defense," a study by the Center for Responsive Politics, between 1989 and 1994 these four senators received a total of \$487,000—an average of \$121,000 each—from the defense industry. On the other hand, those Democrats who voted to kill this measure took in an average of \$50,000 from the industry.

During the debate, Bumpers confronted bill co-sponsor Lieberman, who has argued that the loan guarantees will "protect defense companies" by providing "a level playing field" in global arms markets. Describing Lieberman's reasoning as "ingenuous," Bumpers said it was absurd to claim that "we need to level the playing field when we already have 53 percent of the market." Bumpers then challenged the bill's supporters to list countries that would need such guarantees. In response, Republican co-sponsor Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho cited Greece and Turkey as two deserving recipients.

That's sweet. Someone should remind him that last November the United States sent a cruiser to the Aegean Sea to help ensure that Greece and Turkey, two historic enemies, did not start a small war over disputed territorial waters.

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Her education in life took place in a series of concentration camps—Auschwitz, Birkenau, Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen: an experience she lived through thanks to her mother, the heroine of the first volume of her autobiography.

After the war, the two returned to Austria. "But we couldn't find skilled factory work or office jobs," Stojka writes. "The first thing they asked was if you could read and write, and when you said 'no,' you weren't wanted. The only thing left was trade, and I sold textiles and then carpets. Other Rom showed me how."

Stojka originally composed her memoirs for a very personal reason: She wanted her children to know what the war did to their family. So she wrote down her recollections, spelling the German words the way they sounded to her. During an interview with Stojka about the wartime resistance, the Austrian feminist writer Karin Berger borrowed the manuscript. She eventually got Stojka's permission to edit and publish it.

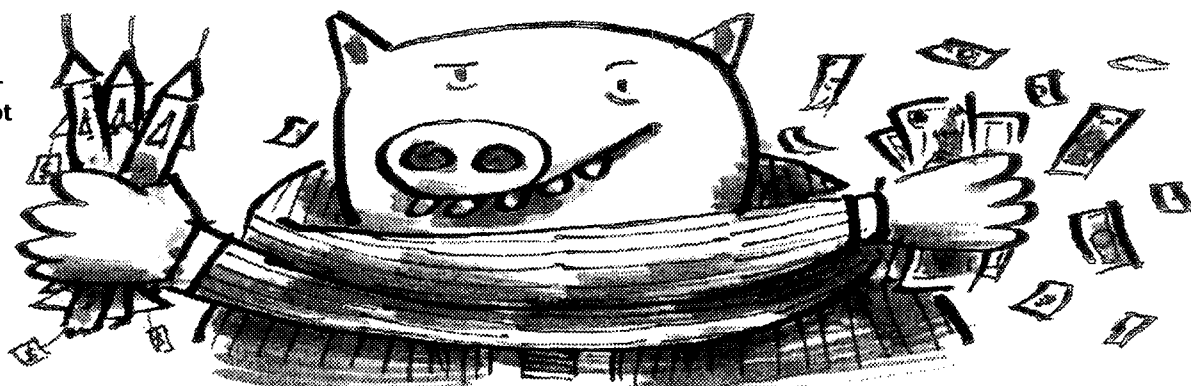
What was originally conceived as a gift to her family unexpectedly transformed Stojka into a celebrity. "Ceija was always the insignificant little sister," she explains. "And then I published a book and achieved recognition. So as not to hurt my siblings, I had to retreat into my shell after that—there was some jealousy—but after four or five years, they saw that it was the right thing to do. And my brother Karl just came out with *his* memoirs."

The Stojkas are now probably the most prominent Rom family in Austria. Ceija's memories of the Holocaust have been translated into Japanese; a second volume of her autobiography appeared in 1992. But the Stojkas are not only writers, they are also well-known painters and musicians. Ceija's songs, performed at family get-togethers and "Roma balls," were transcribed and issued on tape recently. And her paintings, generally of life in caravans and concentration camps, have been exhibited around Austria. A book of color reproductions titled *Ceija Stojka* appeared this year.

Her ability to produce works of great power without formal instruction challenges the usefulness of terms like "naive," "non-professional" and "improvisational" to describe Rom art. As practitioners of a non-written culture for many centuries, the Rom cultivated oral transmission and imitation, a complex process currently being studied by ethnologists.

Stojka's major contribution is to offer an alternative to stereotypes of the Rom as wild and uncivilized. As vice-chair of the Romano Center in Vienna, she is often asked to speak for her community at official events. "People still talk about 'the dirty gypsies' or 'the shitty gypsies,'" Stojka observes, "but after they meet you and chat, then they just say 'the gypsies.'"

—Karen Rosenberg



THE FIRST STONE

UNDERMINING THE PUBLIC INTEREST

By Joel Bleifuss

The spirit of James Watt still stalks the Interior Department. Sweetheart deals with industry, illegal "private" files for public documents and purges of troublemakers—this is all just business as usual at the Office of Surface Mining (OSM), an obscure Interior Department agency that critics say is more corrupt under Bill Clinton than at any time during the dismal Reagan-Bush years.

In public, Bruce Babbitt, the earnest, down-home interior secretary, promises to protect America's wilderness from a rapacious resource extraction industry. But behind the scenes, OSM Director Robert Uram, a former coal company lawyer, serves up special favors to the coal mining industry. The OSM oversees 5 million acres of former and current coal mines, including the underground mines of Appalachia and the surface strip mines that gouge the Southwestern landscape.

Uram got his job thanks to his good friend—and Babbitt's best friend—John Leshy, the chief solicitor for the Interior Department. Though Uram was informally offered the job early in the spring of 1993, his hiring was delayed by intense lobbying led by the Citizens Coal Council, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that represents 31 community groups from mining towns across the nation. Despite the council's protest, Clinton formally nominated Uram in November 1993.

Uram set the tone for his tenure at the OSM during his March 1994 confirmation hearings before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. He failed to inform the committee that his previous employer, Amcord Inc., which runs the Amcoal mine in Gallup, N.M., is owned by Hanson Industries of Great Britain. That may seem a minor oversight, except that Hanson also owns Peabody Coal Co., the world's largest coal company.

In an attempt to eliminate any conflicts of interest, the committee requires that all nominees recuse themselves from working on any case involving former employers or business associates, and that the nominee provide the committee with an appropriate list of such enterprises. However, in the

lengthy recusal list that Uram provided the committee, he omitted both Hanson Industries and Peabody Coal Co.

Alan Cole, the chief of public affairs at the OSM, insists that Uram's actions were entirely ethical. He backs up this assertion with a letter from Gabriele Paone, a deputy ethics official in the Interior Department, to the Citizens Coal Council. Paone explained that her office knew of Uram's link to Peabody Coal but had advised Uram not to disclose his link to the company and not to mention Peabody on his recusal list. She added that the committee's recusal standards "do not require a disclosure of the corporate link of companies." White House Counsel Abner Mikva appears to second

this sentiment. In a letter to the council, he wrote, "We have no reason to believe Mr. Uram has been anything other than forthright."

Cole says the Hanson-Peabody flap is another example of the Citizens Coal Council "making trouble for Mr. Uram and the agency" because, as he understands it, "the Citizens Coal Council folks have had some disagreement with agency decisions." Cole is correct in surmising that the Citizens Coal Council does not have faith in Uram's ability to lead the OSM. According to Will Collette, the group's staff director, Uram's conflicts of interest should have immediately disqualified him from consideration for the job. "Even if Peabody Coal was a law-abiding company—which it isn't—the fact that it produces more than 10 percent of America's coal would have required Uram to abstain from so many decisions as director that he would not have been able to function," says Collette.

And, judging from his record at the OSM, it is not at all clear that Uram ever quit working for the coal industry. Under his leadership the agency has mastered the art of "ticket fixing." Again and again, the agency's field inspectors have cited mining companies for violating federal regulations, only to have Uram refuse to discipline the lawbreakers, including Hanson Industries-Peabody Coal.

"Our members feel he is the worst director this agency has ever had," says Collette. "And the [OSM] employees feel he is the worst director the agency has ever had. He has fixed more tickets than the most notorious of the Reagan-Bush directors."

A case in point is the Burnham mine, a 200-acre strip mine on the Navajo reservation near Farmington, N.M., which is owned by Consolidation Coal, a joint venture of Du Pont and Rheinbraun, a German company. This strip mine surrounds a Navajo graveyard, which now stands like a mini-mesa in the middle of the excavated wasteland. Consolidation abandoned the pit in 1984 and has since done nothing to reclaim the land, a blatant violation of federal law. Consequently, in June 1994 an inspector at the OSM's Albu-

ququerque field office cited Consolidation for failing to clean up its mess. The company ignored the citation until last December, when, four days before Christmas, Consolidation's 18 corporate directors were notified that each was personally liable for \$188,000 in fines. Consolidation responded by vigorously lobbying Uram, and in January the OSM signed an agreement that waived the fines and granted Consolidation an indefinite period in which to reclaim the mine. The company has yet to begin any restoration work. "We call it Uram's sweetheart deal," says Collette.

Or take the case of three BHP-Utah International mines that are also located on Navajo land near Farmington. Since 1993, the Nenahnezad Chapter of the Navajo Nation, which is a member of the Citizens Coal Council, has been asking the OSM to supply the community with all records pertaining to the operation of the BHP mines. Such community access is required under the law that established the OSM, the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. But the government stonewalled the request. First, the OSM said there were no proper facilities in which to store the documents. So the Navajos built an addition to their chapter house. Still, no documents arrived.

At a Nov. 5, 1994 public meeting, Uram promised that he was directing the Denver regional office of the OSM to supply the records. But talk is cheap. The OSM regional staff in Denver came up with the excuse that the Indians were too ignorant to understand the documents and would therefore require special training before being given access to them. (This is a first. No other community in the United States has ever been denied access to public records because of alleged educational shortcomings.)

According to Cole, however, Uram's promise was kept and the OSM has supplied these records to the Navajo. Cole claims that Nenahnezad Chapter manager Robert Thomas is satisfied with the way the OSM responded. That is hardly the case. In an attempt to comply with the OSM's training requirement, Thomas drove 10 hours from his home on the Navajo reservation to the agency's Denver office, where he was directed to the OSM library. Thomas spent two days stoically waiting for the promised training, but no one showed up so he left and drove home.

What was the agency trying to hide? An OSM whistleblower, who works as a field inspector, informed the Citizens Coal Council that the agency was not allowing the Nenahnezad Chapter House to be a repository for the mine

records because OSM officials were trying to hide instances of ticket fixing at BHP mines.

In particular, OSM inspectors in 1993 cited BHP's Navajo mine for five violations, including three serious instances of improper blasting. According to federal law, if a mine commits three violations, the agency is required to convene a hearing at which the company must give cause why the OSM should allow it to continue operation. With BHP, however, the agency merely ordered the director of the Albuquerque field office to send a letter to the BHP mine manager, telling him that there were incidents that could constitute a pattern of violations. He then asked the mine to review its blasting practices and to prevent any such future occurrences. Since that letter, there have been repeated violations at the BHP mine and more citizen complaints, but the OSM has taken no action.

With the OSM refusing to send the Navajo the mine's records, the Citizens Coal Council began filing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests with the agency. So far, the council's various FOIA requests have failed to dislodge pertinent documents from the OSM, apparently because the agency has devised a crafty way to keep evidence of wrongdoing out of the public record.

Next issue: The secret files of the OSM.

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



L A B O R

Temping fate

The labor movement responds to the spread of contingent work.

By Philip Mattera

In November 1994, an unusual classified ad appeared in South Carolina's *Greenville News*. Although it looked like dozens of other listings seeking temporary laborers, the ad had not been placed by a business trying to get some task done on the cheap.

Instead, the Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment (CAFE), a Greenville-based workers-advocacy organization with roots in the civil rights movement, was looking to hire a group of temporary laborers to talk about their working lives. CAFE's activists, having noted the growing prominence of often abusive temporary-help services in the Greenville area, decided they needed to find out more about this new labor

market from temps themselves. Since these harried and underpaid people were not likely to come to a meeting, CAFE decided to hire a group of 19 temps full time for a week.

In what they called the Temp School, CAFE activists learned that temps felt they had lost control of their lives. The temp agencies they depended on for work expected them to be on call constantly and to accept any assignment. Often the services sent workers out over long distances for jobs that lasted only a few hours and barely paid the cost of the gas it took to get there. Frequently, the agencies charged workers for their own safety equipment, thus making their already low rate of pay even lower. "Sometimes people were even being charged to be tested for drugs," says Charles Taylor, CAFE's state coordinator.

During their week "on the job," the participants in the Temp School not only discussed the problems and hardships of temping, they suggested solutions. Along with CAFE activists, they developed a plan of action that included the formation of a temp workers association and the launch of a campaign to pressure temp services to reform their practices. Several graduates of the Temp School are now working with CAFE to carry out this program.

Organizing workers who don't have regular hours, a fixed workplace or a single employer has become an urgent issue for the labor movement in the 1990s. Paying the workers you're trying to organize is just one of the unorthodox methods unions and other labor organizations are using to address the growth of temporary employment. American business, obsessed with reducing costs and increasing flexibility, has become addicted to the use of "contingent" workers, making them one of the fastest-growing segments of the labor force. From 1990 to 1994 the average number of workers engaged by temp services soared nearly 70 percent, while overall employment rose less than 4 percent. Last year, the temp agency Manpower Inc. recorded a payroll of 750,000, making it the nation's largest private employer.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which recently released its first survey on the subject, estimates that as many as 6 million workers can be considered contingent, which the survey defines as those without a promise of ongoing employment. The BLS also concluded that more than 12 million people—more than 9 percent of the work-

As membership in America's unions has plunged over the last two decades, there has been an equally dramatic rise in the number of poorly paid temporary workers. Though most unions have long considered temps unorganizable, a few unions—along with groups outside the traditional labor movement—have begun experimenting with aggressive new strategies to bring these workers union-style wages and benefits. Longtime labor writer Philip Mattera explores the growth of these efforts and assesses their chances for success. This article is the second in a series on innovations that are reshaping America's labor movement.

force—fall into the partially overlapping category of those with “alternative work arrangements,” which the bureau defines as independent contractors, on-call and day laborers, temp-agency workers, and workers provided by contract firms. The survey found that the contingent workforce has a greater percentage of women and African-Americans than the workforce in general, and contingent workers are highly likely to be young and employed in the service sector.

While many companies claim that contingent employment allows them much-needed “flexibility,” in practice it serves as a device for slashing labor costs and weakening workers. For example, NYNEX, the regional phone company in the Northeast, has been using more than 1,000 temps to do telemarketing work at a Braintree, Mass., facility. The temps, who are mostly black and Hispanic, have no benefits, and are paid less than half the wage given to a group of older, mainly white workers who do essentially the same job in the same office.

“Treating workers this way is a sign that paternalism is dead—the gloves are off,” says Rand Wilson, until recently director of Massachusetts Jobs With Justice and a former organizer for the Communications Workers of America, which is exploring the possibility of organizing the NYNEX temps.

Until the past few years, much of organized labor made no effort to include contingent workers, whom organizers viewed only as a threat to unionized jobs. “Most unions weren’t interested in representing people who didn’t work full time,” says Kate Bronfenbrenner, director of labor education research at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

Consequently, much of the emphasis on organizing contingent workers has emerged not from unions but from other kinds of labor-advocacy organizations, such as CAFE. This activity is most visible in the South, the region of the country that, not coincidentally, has the lowest level of union membership. “What’s worst about work tends to show up here,” says Cynthia Brown, executive director of Southerners for Economic Justice, a Durham, N.C.-based organization that has joined CAFE, the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network and the Atlanta Union of the Homeless in the contingent labor working group of the Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network.

The working group, through which the four groups share information and resources, recently received an \$80,000 grant from Oxfam America. Bernadette Orr, U.S. program development coordinator for Oxfam, says her group is better known for its hunger-relief work in the Third World, but she sees the plight of low-wage American workers as part of a worldwide trend of downward economic mobility. “The U.S. is experiencing trends analogous to the global South,” she notes. “Workers are being displaced from better-paid industrial jobs and end up doing low-wage contingent labor.”

The network’s organizations bring a great deal of valuable experience to the issue of contingent work. Among the

activists in the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network is Shirley Reinhardt, who in 1989 formed Citizens Against Temporary Services (CATS), a grass-roots organization that has campaigned aggressively for regulation of temp services. CATS sought to win approval of a Tennessee law that would have limited the number of days per year a person could be employed as a temp before the employer would have to make the position permanent. The bill would have clarified who was responsible for workers compensation claims and bolstered temporary workers right to unemployment insurance.

In response, the temp industry put enormous pressure on Tennessee state legislators, vowing to launch a major public campaign to oppose the bill. Eventually, Tennessee passed a watered-down law that simply required temp services to register with the state—and even that rule, according to Reinhardt, is not being closely enforced. “We were up against too much money and too much power,” she says.

The Atlanta Union of the Homeless has also fallen short in its attempt to legislate reform of the temp-work industry. For the past six years, the group has been organizing around the most exploitative form of contingent work: the day-labor pools that employ mainly homeless persons to do menial jobs under the most miserable conditions. Working with Georgia state Rep. Rita Valenti, a Democrat, the Atlanta Union got a bill introduced to curb practices such as charging day laborers for the equipment needed to perform the work. After a series of public hearings brought shocking revelations about the conditions of the day laborers, the legislation was enacted in 1992.

The legislature, however, has declined to appropriate money to enforce the law, thus taking the teeth out of the regulations. “We’re still fighting to get funding,” says Jerome Scott, a participant in the labor-pool battle who is now chair of Project South, the parent organization of the Atlanta Union of the Homeless.

In place of a legislative focus, the Southern economic-justice groups are now planning to use direct pressure tactics—such as demonstrations, workplace actions and publicity campaigns—to persuade temp services to adopt a code of fair conduct. CAFE plans to ask its members to serve as testers to determine whether specific temp services are adhering to the standards.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and 9to5, a national working women’s association, are also focusing on standard-setting in a joint initiative on contingent labor they launched earlier this year. In what they call the “Flexible But Fair” campaign, the two organizations are trying to address the needs of both contingent workers and regular workers whose jobs may be threatened by contingent work. The new initiative is undertaking a wide-ranging survey of workers in both categories. SEIU and 9to5 will use the results to draw up a list of specific reform proposals. The aim of these proposals will be to promote a different model of workplace flexibility that takes into account the

needs of workers (especially working mothers)—and limits the ability of employers to use temp workers to undercut wages and benefits. “Everyone deserves flexibility on the job,” says Judith McCullough of SEIU’s Office Workers Division, “but we want to limit the opportunities for employers to make jobs contingent.”

SEIU has also been a pioneer in another form of contingent-worker organizing through its “Justice for Janitors” campaign. Over the past decade, the union has signed up 35,000 building-service workers through aggressive tactics aimed at the large commercial landlords that subcontract their cleaning work to small firms that hire workers on a contingent basis. (See *In These Times*, May 1.)

The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) has adopted a similar approach to the temp dilemma in a joint campaign with Baltimoreans United in Leadership and Development (BUILD), a network of the city’s black churches. The AFSCME-BUILD partnership is attempting to organize the low-paid contingent workers who are doing custodial labor and other jobs AFSCME members lost as a result of the privatization of government functions. Whereas Justice for Janitors has aimed at winning formal collective bargaining agreements, AFSCME and BUILD are trying to recreate community ties. “These are the most disconnected of all workers,” says BUILD organizer Jonathan Lange. “They are unchurched, non-union—completely without mediating institutions.” To fill the void, AFSCME and BUILD are helping workers create a new organization that will deal with both community and workplace issues. In the meantime, AFSCME and BUILD have addressed the immediate economic needs of the workers. Earlier this year, they successfully pressured the Baltimore city government to adopt a “living wage” ordinance that sets a wage floor (starting at \$6.10 an hour) for work done under municipal contracts.

The unconventional tactics adopted by SEIU, AFSCME and a few other unions—forming alliances with community groups, exerting public pressure outside the workplace, and organizing outside the strict confines of the National Labor Relations Act—are beginning to take root in the rest of the labor movement. “The spread of contingent labor means that unions have to adopt more creative and confrontational strategies,” says Richard Bensinger, the executive director of the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute. “The labor movement will have to look more like the civil rights movement.”

Bensinger is not daunted by the challenges of organizing

even as transitory a group of workers as temps. “With enough resources we could take on the likes of Manpower Inc. We can’t assume they can’t be beaten.” He said the Organizing Institute is exploring the idea of choosing a city and helping unions launch a campaign that would pressure all employers to accept a workers’ bill of rights, under the threat of sanctions by the labor movement.

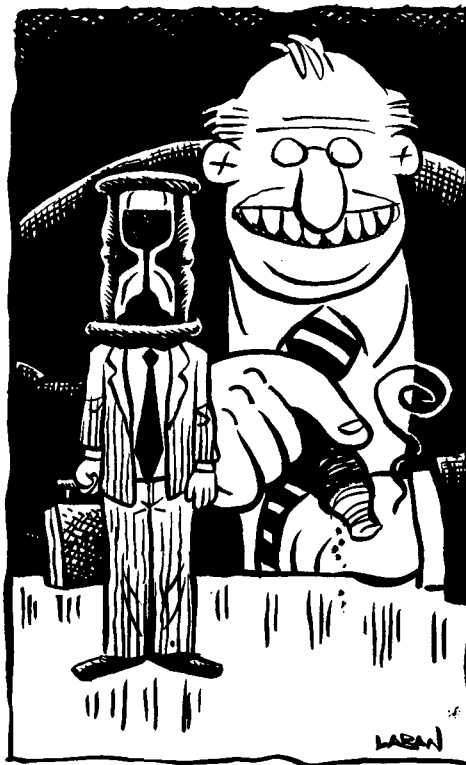
Even if what used to be known as Big Labor embarks on this militant path, a yet more fundamental change in unions will probably be necessary to confront the challenge posed by contingent labor. Dorothy Sue Cobble, an associate professor at the Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations, sees the rise of contingent labor as a sign of the limits of the enterprise-based industrial unionism that has dominated organizing since the 1930s. According to Cobble, the recent rise of contingent work is a throwback to 19th-century labor conditions, and it may be that an earlier form of organizing—pre-New Deal occupational unionism—is now appropriate once again.

Occupational unionism is usually identified with skilled or craft workers, but there is no reason it has to be. Cobble believes that unions organizing today’s temporary office workers, for instance, could play the same role as the old craft unions in setting skill standards, training workers, arranging for benefits not dependent upon a single employer and providing other services. Just as a carpenters or plumbers union local today may provide skilled members to unionized contractors, temp unions—instead of temp agencies—could oversee the assignment of temporary workers. This approach may, in fact, be welcomed by business, particularly small firms that lack a

sophisticated “human resource” operation. By taking greater control over the management of the labor force, a new breed of occupational unions would be in a position to prevent many of the abuses now rampant among contingent workers.

Citing the example of the waitress unions of the early 20th century, Cobble argues that “unions need to control the supply of labor.” Rand Wilson agrees: “Instead of Manpower Inc. being the biggest supplier of labor in this country, it should be SEIU or some other union.”

The notion of controlling the supply of labor has generated intense discussion among groups dealing with contingent labor. Some activists believe that the only way to deal with the temp services is to supplant them with nonprofit agencies that provide flexible employment under less exploitative conditions. The Atlanta Union of the Homeless, for exam-



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ple, is exploring the possibility of creating its own day-labor service. In San Francisco, the Industrial Workers of the World is trying to get a nonprofit temp service off the ground as part of a project to start a temp workers union.

The dilemma that arises out of such initiatives is that by getting into the temp business, a union or other workers organization becomes its members' employer. What worked on a short-term basis for CAFE when it set up its Temp School is bound to create a conflict of interest, especially for unions, over the longer term: A union cannot be an effective advocate for workers when it is also their boss.

One way out of this trap is to return to the old system of hiring halls, which are essentially union-run referral agencies for jobs that may be either short-term or indefinite. Construction unions have used hiring halls extensively; they have given the practice a bad name because of their habitual favoritism and discrimination. Such abuses are not, however, inherent to hiring halls if the history of the waitress unions, described in Cobble's 1991 book *Dishing It Out*, is any indication.

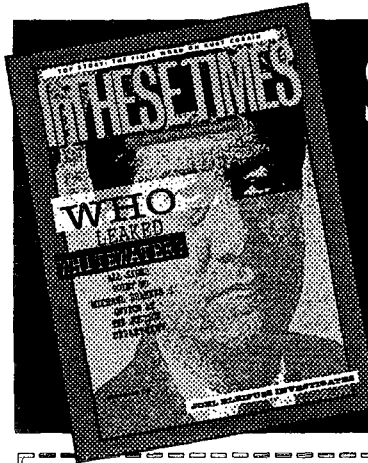
The more difficult questions are how to pressure employers to use hiring halls for their labor needs and how to ensure that those employers provide acceptable wages and working conditions. The construction unions accomplish this by negotiating pre-hire agreements with contractors that require union membership as a condition of employment. Building-trades unions are able to do this because of a special exemption to the National Labor Relations Act created by Congress in 1959, precisely because of the transient character of construction employment. Peter Goselin, a longtime activist in District 1199 of the hospital workers union in New England who is now with a law firm in Connecticut, argues that the way to deal with contingent labor is to expand the construction exemption to the temporary-help industry.

Goselin admits there are two difficulties with this idea. First, it would require pro-worker federal legislation from a Congress that has other priorities; second, some labor activists regard pre-hire agreements as an undemocratic, top-down form of organizing. These agreements put unions in the position of negotiating with employers without the involvement of the rank and file.

There is no obvious way to resolve the latter problem. Unions will have to make some difficult choices in order to create a system that can protect temporary and other contingent workers.

As they reckon with such choices, unions will also have to recognize that such protections are in the interest not only of the 10 percent or so of workers who currently meet the BLS definition of contingent labor. Given the endless corporate quest for flexibility, job security is becoming a thing of the past for nearly everyone. The solution to the riddle of contingent-labor organizing may very well be the key to the future of the entire labor movement.

Philip Mattera is a New York-based freelance writer who writes on work and corporate power. He is an officer of the National Writers Union (UAW Local 1981).



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T R A D E

Maquiladoras unbound

EIGHTEEN-year-old Judith Yanira Viera would love to be a teacher. But the petite Salvadoran woman had to drop out of school after the eighth grade, and, at age 14, began working in a factory to help support her single mother and three sisters.

NAFTA will make bad working conditions worse if it is extended to the Caribbean basin.

By David Moberg

She wanted to attend night school, but at Mandarin International, a Taiwanese-owned factory producing garments for the Gap, Eddie Bauer, J.C. Penney and Dayton-Hudson, she often had to work 14 hours or more a day, six days a week. So there was little time for sleep, let alone education. "The bosses said, 'School or work,' " she explains. "If you go to school, they fire you."

Over the past two months, however, Viera has proven herself to be a very

effective teacher about the new global economy. Traveling with 17-year-old Claudia Leticia Molina from Honduras, who also works in a special export-oriented factory, or maquiladora, Viera is touring the United States under the sponsorship of the union-backed National Labor Committee.

The two vividly describe their hellish jobs: Employees at their maquiladoras—who are typically young women—are often limited to two carefully monitored bathroom breaks, sexually abused by supervisors, denied medical care, and kept alert through grueling workdays with loud music, harassment and "little pills" from their employers.

Viera, who was fired in June for supporting the union at Mandarin, earned about 56 cents an hour, wages that left her family in deep poverty even though two of her sisters also worked at Mandarin. Judith earned about 12 cents for each Gap T-shirt she sewed. In the United States the shirts sell for \$20. Last year, Gap CEO Donald Fisher was paid more than \$2 million, not counting stock options, enhancing his personal worth of more than \$1.5 billion.

Mandarin is located in a free-trade zone owned by a former Salvadoran Army colonel, who established the zone with financial assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development. Since the 1984 passage of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), which provided tariff reductions for certain exports to the United States from Central American and Caribbean countries, exports from the region's specially designated free-trade zones have soared several thousand percent. In fact, the U.S. government has encouraged many American companies to shift manufacturing to the region.

Even as U.S. firms have shifted work to the Caribbean basin, however, real wages in the region have plummeted by half, and unions have been systematically suppressed. Despite the CBI's sorry history, the U.S. Congress is now considering legislation that would extend many of the tariff reductions in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico to Caribbean and Central American countries. Known as the Caribbean Basin Trade Security Act, the bill would give corporations many of the benefits of NAFTA while potentially weakening the meager labor protections of the CBI.

But if any workers need labor protection, it's Viera's co-workers in El Salvador. In 1993, the Mandarin employees formed a union, and the company illegally fired 100 workers, including union leaders. Then, in January of this year, they reorganized and became the first union officially recognized by the government in a Salvadoran

maquiladora. Mandarin reluctantly agreed to recognize the union, but has since fired more than 350 union supporters out of its 850-person workforce. The employees, who have since gone out on strike, have been offered bribes to renounce the union, threatened with violence or beaten, and given the choice of joining an alternative company "union" or losing their job.

Many of the U.S. companies that sell the clothes produced by Judith, Claudia and their co-workers pride themselves on their social responsibility. The Gap even has a code of conduct for its contractors, including a requirement that "business partners may neither threaten nor penalize employees for their efforts to organize or bargain collectively." But Mandarin workers never saw the code when they began organizing, and the Gap—which claims its representatives saw no violations at the plant—clearly does not enforce it.

National Labor Committee Executive Director Charles Kernaghan argues that such codes of conduct are "next to worthless," a conclusion borne out by a *Wall Street Journal* article on the policies earlier this year. But they are not completely worthless, because they open up opportunities to pressure publicity-conscious companies to demand better performance from their contractors.

Similarly, though the labor protections contained in some U.S. trade laws, including the CBI, have often proven ineffective, they also are not worthless. Indeed, Kernaghan fears that the Caribbean Basin Trade Security Act, which is likely to be attached without any floor debate to the main budget bill this fall, will further undermine already weak international labor rights. Sponsored by ultraconservative Rep. Phil Crane (R-IL), the act would extend tariff and quota provisions of NAFTA to the Caribbean basin countries as a prelude to incorporating them within an expanded NAFTA within a decade or less. Backers argue that trade liberalization with Mexico is hurting the CBI countries and thus that the region badly needs a break. But the evidence suggests that NAFTA has so far had only a minor impact on exports from the region.

The real breaks are more likely intended for big U.S. companies, mainly apparel importers. Crane told a meeting of representatives from maquiladoras and multinationals last December: "You write the Caribbean trade bill. I'll submit to the Congress whatever you want." The bill that emerged reduces tariffs by about \$240 million a year, a windfall for companies such as the Gap, which contributed \$60,000 to the Republican National Committee earlier this year, and Fruit of the Loom, which gave \$100,000 to the committee.

Though Crane's bill would preserve the CBI's weak language on labor rights, it would permit Caribbean basin countries to evade the more effective labor provisions in the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), a U.S. law that establishes labor and human rights standards for American trading partners. Annual GSP reviews helped

force El Salvador to pass a new labor code, though it isn't enforced. And GSP reviews, which allow public participation, have put pressure on Guatemala, where trade union leaders are still violently assaulted.

Kernaghan charges that under Crane's bill, which includes extensive trademark and copyright protections, "the Gap label and other intellectual property are protected, but the young women who make Gap shirts aren't protected." He wants any tariff breaks to be tied to tougher enforcement of labor rights, including guarantees of annual reviews, public participation and GSP sanctions that can be targeted at individual companies and not just entire countries. Because GSP sanctions can now be imposed only against a nation, the United States has been reluctant to penalize a whole country for the labor violations of a single firm.

Republican leaders in the House and Senate strongly oppose including environmental or labor protections in any future trade legislation. On the other hand, House Progressive Caucus members Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) and Peter DeFazio (D-OR), among others, are planning to introduce legislation this fall that would establish benchmarks—on trade balance, job creation, currency stability, the environment and democratic rights—that must be met in order to continue or expand NAFTA.

At this point, 20 months after NAFTA's passage and more than a decade into the CBI agreement, few workers in the United States, Mexico or the Caribbean basin have benefited from either treaty. Even when measured by the promises of its proponents, NAFTA has been a decided failure. According to a survey by Public Citizen, in 59 out of 66 cases, companies that claimed NAFTA would increase their American jobs or exports have failed to match their stated targets. Indeed, several big companies—including Allied Signal, Bechtel, General Electric, Proctor and Gamble, Scott Paper and Zenith—that had promised to create new jobs in the United States have instead laid off workers because of NAFTA. Meanwhile, unemployment has gone up, and real wages have plummeted in Mexico.

Yet mainstream opinionmakers insist that capital is simply being reallocated to its most efficient uses and that everyone will benefit—eventually. Even Judith Viera and Claudia Molina should be happy: After all, they were even poorer before they started making fashionable T-shirts for American kids their age.

"Very often we've heard, 'Isn't it better to have that job you have rather than nothing?'" Viera says of skeptics she's encountered on her U.S. tour. "I tell them [that maquiladoras are] creating jobs, but they're not jobs that offer us anything. Many times during the strike in the maquiladora, workers told the companies, if you're going to keep us like slaves, it's better to leave. True, we need jobs, but not under those conditions."

B L A C K A M E R I C A

White and white and read all over

*Coverage of
the Reynolds
and Simpson
cases reveals a
lingering
racial bias in
the media.*

By Salim Muwakkil

After a Cook County jury convicted Rep. Mel Reynolds (D-IL) on August 23 of having sex with an underage campaign worker, demonstrators outside the courthouse left crudely lettered signs expressing their support for the unrepentant congressman. One of the signs bore a familiar legend: "Run O.J., run"—but with "O.J." crossed out and "Mel" scrawled in its place. This was by no means the only commentary equating the 43-year-old congressman with another notable African-American in trouble with the law. All across Chicago and throughout the United States, many African-Americans view both Reynolds and murder suspect O.J. Simpson as unfairly besieged black men.

For Reynolds especially, this is a strange and ironic transformation. During his successful 1992 campaign for Congress, Reynolds

projected himself as a "post-race" candidate and bitterly criticized incumbent Gus Savage for highlighting the support Reynolds received from white and, more specifically, Jewish contributors. Reynolds charged his volatile opponent with using charges of racism to veil his incompetence. Immediately after learning of his 12-count indictment, however, Reynolds changed his tune, portraying himself as a martyred black male under attack by a racist prosecutor. Although his accusations were shrill and transparently self-serving, the tactic had its desired effect—generating considerable sympathy for the congressman among black constituents in his South Side district.

Why are African-Americans so willing to accept such claims of racial victimization? Part of it is a cultural reflex: Blacks' bitter history has fostered a certain sympathy for social outlaws and a faith in their redemption. Examples of the phenomenon abound: Washington Mayor Marion Barry, after being videotaped smoking crack and jailed, was overwhelmingly re-elected by the city's

mostly black electorate last year; heavyweight boxer and convicted rapist Mike Tyson was met with a huge celebration upon his return to New York City in June. Even Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, whom few blacks even remotely regard as an advocate for their community, aroused the sympathy of many when he equated the sexual-harassment testimony in his 1991 confirmation hearings to a "high-tech lynching."

Ever since their arrival in the New World, African-Americans have been contained and constrained within a social environment of white supremacy. And blacks who have challenged the official and unofficial enforcers of that racist status quo—from municipal police forces to Ku Klux Klan lynch mobs—have often been cast as heroic figures. But animus against the nation's criminal justice system cannot by itself explain the strong tendency among African-Americans to doubt the charges of police officers and prosecutors. Another motive is at work: African-Americans are attempting to shed the burden of negative stereotypes.

Even though black men comprise a mere 6 percent of the U.S. population, they are America's "most wanted" personifier of social deviance and transgression. Justice Thomas is the mascot of sexual harassment; Simpson is the dark symbol of domestic violence; Tyson is the date-rape man. For many, entertainer Michael Jackson now represents the horror of child sexual abuse, and black gangsta rappers are portrayed as the sociopathic bogeymen of pop music. Black men have become the cultural totems for virtually all that is wrong with America.

This racial typecasting is remarkably routine, and perhaps for that reason it is subjected to little analysis. Mainstream

American culture traditionally has portrayed African-Americans as human aberrations. How else could Americans reconcile slavery with the Christianity most of them professed, except by thoroughly dehumanizing enslaved Africans? The media historically has helped sustain that view. During this country's early years, coverage of African-Americans was flagrantly, often viciously, biased. Then, as now, lurid crime stories were the focus of much, if not most, reporting about blacks. By the late 1880s, when newspapers had secured their position as the dominant influence on public opinion, most of the country's prestigious publications routinely disseminated vile stereotypes of blacks.

By the turn of the century, fear was rampant in white America that newly mobile blacks would overrun their communities with corrupting influences and, worst of all, rape their women. From 1882 to the early 1920s, lynching was commonplace in the South—and gained much support in the rest of the country as well. Even President Theodore Roosevelt tacitly justified the practice, explaining to Congress in 1906 why so many blacks ended up at the end of a rope. "The greatest existing cause of lynching," said Roosevelt, quoted in Herbert Shapiro's *White Violence And Black Response*, "is the perpetration, especially by black men, of the hideous crime of rape—the most abominable in all the category of crimes, even worse than murder." This presidential justification for lynching was evidence that the media propaganda of the day had wide-ranging influence. And Roosevelt's assessment reflected the general consensus among white Americans.

Because of increasing interpersonal contact between blacks and whites, sexual taboos were strictly enforced. Sex thus became the arena for some of the most damaging depictions of African-Americans, particularly men. In both the slave and post-slave South, black men were routinely murdered for the mere hint of an interracial liaison. Stringent anti-miscegenation laws were enacted to restrict sexual contact between black men and white women. Of course, the substantial population of mulatto blacks provided graphic evidence that white men were seldom dissuaded by those strictures.

By now, the cultural consensus that African-Americans are inherently inclined toward sloth and criminality is so entrenched that it operates sub rosa. Thus, stereotyped portrayals of African-Americans are so seamlessly woven into media images that we hardly notice.

"Part of the problem with stereotypes is that they're really a kind of projection," explains Roderick J. Watts, an associate professor of psychology at DePaul University in Chicago. "White Americans historically have projected the ills of society as a whole onto black folks." Much of Watts' research involves studying the way stereotyping affects the self-perceptions of young black men. Like other observers, Watts argues that slavery's crippling legacy has left African-Americans ill-equipped to counteract the psychological damage of negative stereotypes that pervade the media.

The effects, Watts explains, are often devastating. "We

use the media as a hook to get these young men to talk about themselves," he says, "and we've found that they have very low expectations of their roles as black males and a serious lack of hope for any kind of mainstream success. Most of those feelings are a product of their immediate environments, but they are reinforced by the media images fed back to them."

The problem was amply demonstrated last year when *Time* magazine darkened Simpson's face in a famous cover photo following his arrest for the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. While the magazine's editors disclaimed any racist intent, their action had clearly racist overtones. The biases underlying the decision of those editors—who strenuously, perhaps sincerely, professed their racial sensitivity—are insidious precisely because they are so much more subtle than the fire-breathing racism of their 19th-century antecedents. The only way such biases can be checked is to ensure diversity in the decision-making process.

That was the overwhelming consensus at the groundbreaking "Unity '94" convention of minority journalists held in Atlanta in July 1994. The unprecedented gathering addressed issues of media stereotyping and sought to develop more effective strategies to resist it. "At *Time*, there was not one person of color in the hierarchy to pass on this darkened photo of Simpson," explained panelist Earl Caldwell, a veteran columnist with the New York *Daily News*.

But since white Americans have such a cultural investment in maintaining those stereotypes, the struggle to gain control of such images is sure to be a hard-fought one. Many black theorists already have concluded that the fight is fruitless. They believe that the mainstream media's depiction of black life will invariably be based on the needs of white America. "White people will never allow black people to make the kind of decisions that threaten their social and political dominance," argues Lu Palmer, a black Chicago activist and former columnist for the defunct Chicago *Daily News*. Like many black nationalists, Palmer is convinced that the only hope African-Americans have to counter mainstream stereotypes is to develop an independent, alternative media.

From 1974 to 1976, Palmer published a newspaper called *Black Xpress*, which refused all advertising from white-owned corporations. His failure to sustain the publication—lack of ad revenue, inadequate distribution and a general lack of investment capital—is indicative of the barriers obstructing the development of an independent black press. And although there have been some recent improvements in the sorry state of the existing black media, there are few signs it will develop into a robust alternative to the all-pervasive popular media.

Without such alternatives, however, black Americans are dependent on a mainstream media with a shameful tradition of racial defamation. Because of that history, it seems likely that black Americans will continue to look deeply for the good in their miscreant brethren, even as the media chronicles their evils.

FALLBOOKS



The many and the one

By Jean Bethke Elshtain

Whether in celebration or lament, the United States is usually seen as a militantly individualistic country. From "Don't Tread on Me" to current debates over the right to bear arms, to express oneself, to retreat into defensive enclaves (whether as walled-off suburbanites with private security forces or as isolated members of remote militias) to parade as defiant protesters, the rights of individuals serve as our well-worn coin of the political and legal realm. But there is an unresolved tension embedded in our history and our primary documents between individual rights and immunities and a vision of "we the people." It is an ambiguity encoded in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, in a simultaneous commitment to a "we" and to protection of the "one," and it is at one and the same time a source of strength and a cause for concern. Current debates over individualism and communitarianism are not, therefore, engagements between traditionalists and antitraditionalists, or between liberals and restorationists. Rather, the intensity of, and interest in, this discussion is best understood as a contestation over the appropriation of tradition itself.

Two books recently published by Harvard University Press offer a vantage on the



Law and the Company We Keep
By Aviam Soifer
Harvard University Press
288 pp., \$39.95

Beyond Individualism
By Michael Piore
Harvard University Press
224 pp., \$22.95

troubled nature of this debate. Michael Piore, a professor of economics and management at M.I.T., and Aviam Soifer, dean of the Boston College School of Law, come to praise rather than to bury the importance of group identity, even group rights, but—and here's the rub—not all groups enjoy their unalloyed blessing. Piore is interested in the "emerging conflict between social demands and economic constraints"—constraints that are themselves the result of a political process that tilts in favor of a few to the detriment of the many, on his reading of our situation. Soifer is vexed by "binary thinking" (the trashing of which is by now standard fare in academic circles), and his text is peppered with a list of bad words, first and foremost being "binary" itself, but "binary" keeps company with "dichotomous," "formalistic," "narrow" and "either/or" as something devoutly to be avoided. If we can rid our minds of ways of thinking that deserve opprobrium as binary, we can, perhaps, get out of the rut we are in and think more creatively about associational life and the standing of groups in American law. Both Piore and Soifer seek new forms of recognition and respect for groups. Soifer believes that only when we find some way to acknowledge explicitly the importance that groups have always had, will we wind up with a more coherent, ethical and just legal order. Piore argues, meanwhile, that acknowledgment of "cohesive social groups" and subsequent "group representation" will help us to find our way out of the deep limitations and inadequacies of individualism and liberal social theory. Although Piore doesn't offer a sustained critique of individualism, his primary complaint seems to be that it militates against strong group identification—and by extension, radical social change.

But what is a group? Let's begin with Piore, as his is the more perplexing volume, one that would have benefited enormously from a few strong, fleshed-out examples of the phenomena he explicates. What he settles for instead is a standard list of flattened-out interest-group affiliations. He compresses into this list those groups defined by what he calls "social identity," namely, "ethnic and racial minorities, women, the handicapped, the disabled, the aged, gays and lesbians." Piore fails to distinguish between plural associations—eg., civic associations with self-selected memberships—and identity groups that presume a homogeneity of interest, in part through government policy.

This gives one pause. To what extent, for example, can "women" be said to be a group or a coherent social identity? I recall a conference I attended in 1972, during the early days of feminism, in which one very irate woman blasted into a microphone that "all women are oppressed, from Jackie Onassis to a single mother on welfare." The "from ... to" stuck in my mind. I pondered: What, concretely, can this mean? One finds a world of plenty and privilege, on the one hand; a world of poverty and powerlessness, on the other.

Am I really to link the two worlds indiscriminately? It didn't make a lot of sense, then or now. Whatever Jackie Onassis and a young black teenager in a violent, impoverished neighborhood may share, it cannot be an identical "social identity" based on verisimilitude of their shared oppression. But this is precisely the sort of thing Piore has to assume to make his analysis stick. That it doesn't stick is, therefore, to be explained in part because, even as he calls for group coherence and cohesion, his own interpretation of these terms begins to unravel.

Take another of his examples, that group he calls "the aged." Who are these folks? Do you enter this world of

"social identity" when you become 60 years old? Is the world of the ardently youthful 70-year-old who goes to aerobics class three days a week the same world as that of the 50-year-old victim of Alzheimer's? Is the social identity of "seniors" living in an age-specific cohort of condos in Palm Beach the same as that of the frightened women and men who died, by the hundreds, in the heat wave in Chicago this past July because they were apartment-bound elderly who were too frightened or infirm or uninformed to leave their dwellings? In a word or four: Give me a break. If Piore thinks that, by lumping together "women" and "the aged," among others, he has identified (as he claims) "the potential for social mobiliza-

tion," he is living in an academic dream world. That the American Association for Retired Persons can rally thousands to protest any "threat" to a single perk now enjoyed by its constituency, whether their retirement incomes are \$200,000 a year or \$12,000 a year, does not signify protest politics in the interest of social transformation; rather, this is interest-group politics in the interest of the status quo.

Because the real potential for militant social protest of the sort Piore finds necessary is actually so low, his text traffics in a series of counterfactuals: If this ... then this. For example: If labor force segmentation continues apace, and it likely will, given "structural shifts involving particular industries and technologies," then we can expect to see further growth in a "peripheral labor force" that is necessary to, but not an essential part of, the well-paid, permanent workforce. Piore argues that this peripheral labor force, with its marginal placement and perhaps only temporary commitment to the labor market, is nonetheless ripe for the plucking by a resur-

gent trade union movement. What will bring about this unlikely scenario? Such workers will, he claims, eventually be brought up to speed on certain matters, especially on the injustice of their status as part-timers. Here as elsewhere Piore makes a series of segues that assumes a kind of sequencing: Once a group sees where its real interests lie, then coherent social identity and political mobilization will follow.

This is a neo-Marxist dream of the sort that obviously dies hard. Searching about for a substitute for the working class, Piore has found it in "progressively stigmatized" and ghettoized groups: He again recites the litany of "the aged, the handicapped," to which he adds "the medically ill and the mentally ill," in addition to the standby of "racial minorities." But repetition of this litany does not a coherent social group make. Piore's entire assessment of our current predicament and our future possibilities is flawed because it is premised on that which does not exist—a "corporatist" identity group that flows more or less automatically from what political theorists used to call an "ascriptive" characteristic, something we cannot change about ourselves, like our race, ethnicity or gender. Piore wants to eat his cake and have it, too: to endorse the current evocation of multiform, plastic and multiple identities and yet to make these identities as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar—the basis of a vast politics

of social transformation. He struggles mightily to fit his "new social groups" into the more traditional conceptual grid of the New Deal—trade unionism, fights for a minimum wage and the like—but it doesn't work. It doesn't work, in part, because what unions were about was solidarity—a solidarity that cut across ethnic lines, religious lines, and so on—not about "cohesive social identity."

Piore concludes with a baffling chapter on "The American Repertoire," where one finds disjointed references to civic republicanism, yeoman democracy, ethnic communities "and the interpretation of ethnicity." He makes a plea for "common understanding." I have made similar pleas, urging recognition of our fragile commonality, together with our particular distinctiveness. But I am left cold, as well as befuddled, by Piore's insistence that we must somehow evolve a "deep politics" with lots of attention to process if we are to tend to what groups—"women, gays, the aged, the physically handicapped, the deaf" (this, it seems, is the



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final roundup)—all share. He promises a new “activist public policy” along the lines of Johnson’s Great Society or Roosevelt’s New Deal. But this is so far from contemporary possibility as to be nigh parodic. When we are told that the NAFTA debate “was like a Heideggerian breakdown in the evolution of the several social and economic processes with which the agreement was bound up,” it is time to close the text and recoup common sense.

One turns to Aviam Soifer’s *Law and the Company We Keep* with a sense of relief. Soifer, at least, is tethered to the reassuringly empirical material of case law, and the reader is treated to fascinating discussions of thickly detailed, interesting cases as well as a number of intriguing interpretive forays into literature. In one especially strong chapter, Soifer uses Faulkner’s fiction to illustrate the stubborn intransigence of communal obligation and the ways in which we are all bound, willy nilly, to our own past and the past of the social and historical world more generally.

Soifer’s analytical scheme, meanwhile, calls to mind a pet aphorism of my Brandeis law professor Leonard Levy: What happens in constitutional law depends heavily on “whose ox is being gored.” For Soifer, this core notion goes a long way toward explaining the outcomes of a whole series of cases, in part because the “American legal system,” lacking “any theory to handle groups,” is permanently pitched between the competing poles of “individual and state.” In other words, Soifer’s analysis is attuned to (and struggles to find ways through) the basic tensions of individual and group identity embedded in our founding political culture.

Despite the endurance of individualist political discourse, Soifer argues that associations—a term he uses to designate voluntary associations and communities of belief, as well as groupings by gender, race, etc.—remain a fact of our social life, both “inescapable” and inescapably “elements of identity.” But we lack a good way to talk about this, despite the obvious appeal of community and “the values of voluntary associations.” Despite our often “desperate” yearning for community, we retain “the individualistic ideology.” Our “adversarial legal system” plays into this ideology and reinforces it, being a world of “either/or battles with clear-cut individual losers and winners.” Soifer would have us get beyond this conundrum by giving real “substance to pluralism,” for it is within groups that we all live.

This crucial straining at “substance,” of course, is what predominantly conceptual critiques of individualism such as Piore’s sorely lack. By rooting his analysis in the conflicts of case law—and by rendering such conflicts in clear, vivid prose—Soifer also offers plenty of instances of how the pluralist stuff of our social life gets translated into the individualist terms of debate that govern our legal system.

There is, in other words, much to admire in Soifer’s work. Yet, perhaps because of the very absence of any clear language to address issues of group identity, there is some broader conceptual confusion here, as well. Soifer disdains any distinction between what might be called “ground-up”

groups and state-constituted groups. That is, the state itself may compel a “group identity” where none “naturally” (if I may dare use the word) exists. For example: In sanctioning race-based preferences but denying any similar status to class-based or socioeconomic preferences, the state helps to forge a particular identity at the expense of another. For one could make a compelling case that upper-middle-class Americans, black and white, have a good deal more in common with one another than either has with the predominantly African-American inner-city underclass. That racial and class identities intersect and overlap is undoubtedly true. But, in privileging one and eclipsing the other, certain features of identity are sanctioned and rise to the fore; others are quashed, for political and legal purposes. This seems a pretty fundamental recognition. But it doesn’t inform Soifer’s overall theoretical framework or the way he parses particular cases.

Indeed, it’s worth noting that the complicating tensions of class persistently elude many adherents of multicultural group identity. Class always seems to bring up the rear in the multiculturalists’ mantra-like evocation of “race, gender and class.” It’s not hard to see why this should be so: As a form of oppression, class requires a redistribution of resources to be remedied—not simply consciousness-raising, sensitivity sessions and curricular reform. And while contemporary “group” politics holds that racial and gender identities cannot be assimilated into the dominant culture, class is an incorrigibly universalist category. To be seriously acknowledged, it has to be asserted beyond the boundaries of other identities, in a style of thinking and organizing that is now widely regarded as a relic of a naive and retrograde “humanism.”

Soifer also seems to chafe at defending the constitutional rights of groups that stray beyond the terms of group identity that he privileges. If associations serve as amplifiers of different viewpoints, as Soifer claims, then surely we should cherish those that nourish and sustain a *different* viewpoint—as opposed to those that assume a homogeneity of identity based on ascriptive characteristics. In this respect, Soifer’s treatment of religion, or church, as a plural association seems particularly troubling and perplexing. In his discussion of “The Right to Form and Join Associations,” Soifer argues that some groups “merit less constitutional protection than is afforded the sum of their individuals,” even as other groups “should receive more constitutional protection.” This seems a legalistic way of repeating Orwell’s famous maxim that, “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

Might not this formulation create a vast superhighway through associational freedom? Does this mean that the Roman Catholic Church, given its centuries-old teaching on female ordination, becomes a group that receives “less” protection? Who decides what constitutes “gender-based exclusionary practices”? Are Orthodox Jews culpable as well? Or, perhaps, the Black Muslims because, by definition, a white person could never occupy the position now held by the Rev. Farrakhan? One suspects not in the latter instance, given

Soifer's privileging of "racial" and "gender-based" criteria. But the constitutional status of these other groups in Soifer's scheme is not so clear.

Soifer wants to "connect constitutional theory to the reality of our identities as members of myriad associations." Fine. But surely this means that government should recognize but not, so to speak, sponsor group identities. Such sponsorship has a tendency to undermine plurality by promoting the reductionistic view that gender, racial or sexual identity characteristics and interests flow inexorably from racial or sexual "givens." In light of Soifer's powerful indictment of "guilt by association," a simplistic tendency to lump people together on the basis of ethnicity (for example, Japanese-Americans in World War II), or in other dubious ways, he surely has a stake in resisting "innocence" or "virtue" or "prima facie claims" on the basis of ascribed association as well. Or are we to associate people as groups with a presupposition of prima facie claims for some purposes but not for others?

Korematsu vs. the United States, the U.S. Supreme Court's 1944 decision upholding the detention of the Nisei, is a clear-cut and egregious injustice. If this is the outcome of granting government the power to traffic in group identity negatively, don't we play with fire if we enjoin government to do it positively, so to speak? If, as Soifer argues, "the more endangered the group, the more careful constitutional scrutiny ought to be in evaluating actions that intrude upon it," then Soifer ought to spend more time talking about the use of RICO statutes against pro-life protesters with these specific concerns in mind. Race and ethnicity are not voluntary associations; communities of belief involved in political protest are. The latter surely have a stronger claim to being a *plural* group than does a murky grouping on racial lines.

This distinction stands out in high relief when Soifer analyzes the Supreme Court's 1994 *Kiryas Joel* ruling, involving state funding of a school district for developmentally disabled and retarded children in a Brooklyn Orthodox Jewish community. Soifer argues that the case should be interpreted as a problem in the assertion of legitimate group claims—or what he calls "group rights."

At this juncture something of a rhetorical elision has occurred. Soifer has moved from associational freedom to group rights. Are they synonymous? I would argue not. Where Soifer comes down is muddier. For Soifer, the court "rightfully concluded" that the New York legislature could "not carve out a special new school district exactly coterminous with a Satmars Hasidic village." Oddly enough, Soifer doesn't even give the facts of the case; thus, we would not learn from his discussion that the claims of the community had to do with associational freedom as it pertained to a group—the disabled children of the Satmars—with extraordinarily special needs. If anything, Soifer lapses into his own "binary" categories here and it becomes an overly simple "church-state" case; to wit, "the Court held the inextricable link of religious and civil power in the newly minted school district to be too close for constitutional comfort." Power?

Offering instruction to handicapped persons from one's own small community? On these grounds, Soifer's conclusion strains credulity, but it is consistent with his call for "heightened scrutiny" where religious association is concerned.

Though Soifer's is the superior study, both books point up the confused way our political culture continues to handle questions of group identity and rights. Such questions call, first of all, for a coherent understanding of what constitutes a group. Gender, for example, is not a group: It is an ascriptive designation of a person's sex. If a woman belongs to the PTA, she is a member of an organization. But usually membership in such organizations is not so strong as to be *formative*: It does not help forge determinate identities, ends and purposes. If, on the other hand, the woman is a devout Catholic or Baptist, then she is a member of a group that is *formative*, a group of which it can be said that *it* has an identity, and it helps to give others an identity that cuts deep, that isn't merely a surface trait or accident of birth.

To be sure, a woman may have some very specific experiences *qua* woman. There is definitely a sorority of mothers, especially mothers of young children, and many of them see themselves as members of a group with its own definite set of passions, interests and concerns. But even these allegiances are extremely vague and provisional; and the fact remains that no single set of experiences shared by women *per se* constitutes them as a group.

This core recognition—that "group" identity doesn't emerge on the basis of gender or race alone—is missing from both these books, as well as from much of the larger political discourse concerning group rights. The experience of being a Jew in America is not *one* experience. The experience of being black in America is not *one* experience. Out of the experiences of many "ones," groups can be formed. But "membership" that purports to incorporate all who fall within a specific ascriptive designation is very thin indeed. It doesn't cut deep enough to form us; it doesn't go far enough to make us political; and it doesn't deserve to be singled out for the special protection that "rights"-based approaches to the remedy of collective wrongs prescribe.

What is required to create and sustain a group is something more. It involves the foundation of a self with numerous, formative loyalties—civic, religious, communal, parental, etc.—rather than a univocal, static identity based on a presumed history of shared grievance. This "something more" is plural, not singular; an authentically multicultural identity, not a monocultural grouping scripted to compose part of a rhetorical multicultural "community." Until advocates of group identity can more completely attend to these crucial facts of group life, the familiar tensions of individualist right and group allegiance will likely slip into a consensus on the composition of social groups that will, paradoxically, ensure the triumph of harsh forms of narrow self-interest, separatism and individualism. ◀

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FALL BOOKS



And he is often annoyed by “the black person’s burden” of having to enlighten whites who are myopic, if well-meaning:

Beyond the race men

By Jim Sleeper

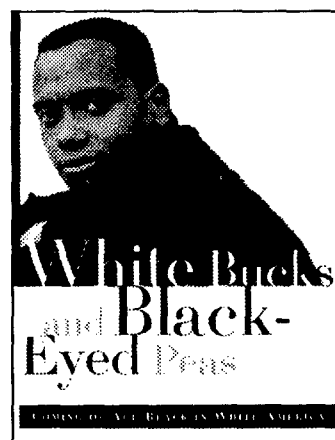
In the past five years, half a dozen African-American professionals have published books about their odysseys from childhood black communities, through rocky initiations into “white” educational institutions, and on to very public—and so perhaps all the more problematic—success, often as not in careers in the media. We have learned of the torments, subtle ironies and sometimes bemused satisfactions of *Washington Post* veterans Nathan McCall (*Makes Me Wanna Holler*) and Jill Nelson (*Voluntary Slavery*) and of *New York Times* editorial writer Brent Staples (*Parallel Time*). Of course, these and other memoirs are as varied as their authors. Still, some readers will greet a book like *White Bucks and Black-Eyed Peas* with a certain weary familiarity: Can much more really be said about black upward mobility by 27-year-old Marcus Mabry, who grew up in a ghetto near Trenton, N.J., went to the elite Lawrenceville School and then to Stanford, and is now *Newsweek*’s Paris correspondent?

The answer, thankfully, is yes, in part because Mabry is about 20 years younger than the other writers mentioned above. “Our generation never knew the America that had crafted a rough consensus on racial equality or how to achieve it,” he writes. “Never buoyed by the hopes and promise of the Civil Rights Era, we were not disappointed when the dream was never realized. ... If I had expected warm fellowship from whites and brotherly understanding from all African-Americans, the disapproval of both would have sent me back long ago. Where to, I do not know. There is no other place for me but here, in this in-between universe.”

As Mabry notes, this core disaffection has bred some cruel ironies. He writes, for example, that while he feels “imprisoned in the cage of low expectations (of whites as well as blacks) in which I have chained the world,” he prefers living “in between” to living “black.” He admits he’s sometimes haunted by a “black survivor’s guilt” toward those who remain trapped in the poverty that dogged his upbringing.

I do not want to join the corps of racial pessimists who litter America. I am not one of them. ... Still, I must reckon the price I paid for the privilege of living in two worlds—one black and poor, one white and affluent—from the fiction within my family to the questioning of my own personhood. The price of success seemed betrayal. I carry with me the scars of “making it”: the uncomfortable and embarrassing [welfare] dependency of my family, the feelings of “tommie,” and the constant balancing act between everyone and everything, black and white.

But these “scars” are bearable, and Mabry carries them believably well, writing with a simplicity and candor that will leave ideologues and “race men” of the Leonard Jeffries-Sister Souljah variety frustrated but most readers grateful. In his beautifully straightforward, unadorned style, Mabry reminds me of another black memoirist who attended an elite prep school, Lorene Cary, whose 1992 book *Black Ice* describes her lonely journey from a solid, black working-class home in Philadelphia to St. Paul’s in New Hampshire, a venerable institution that later put her on its board of trustees. Perhaps the most surprising lesson of Mabry’s and Cary’s books is that some elite bastions of high WASP privilege and provenance afforded unexpected confirmation of the lessons of civil aspiration and honor that members of the black writers’ own families had sought to impress upon them. Ironically (but importantly), it is often white-dominated private schools, including some urban parochial schools, that are anchored in beliefs that compel them to respect the aspirations of blacks who want to *join* a common American civic culture, not trash it as inherently, eternally racist. It’s saddening that this common culture may be otherwise so far eroded that only its remnants in private schools remain capable of genuine integration beyond the reach of legal compulsion. But it is also instructive—and troubling—that blacks who want to keep faith with a common cul-



White Bucks and Black-Eyed Peas: Coming of Age Black in White America

By Marcus Mabry
Charles Scribner's Sons
303 pp., \$23



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ture may find more reinforcement of that impulse in cohesive, self-confident private institutions than in supposedly "inclusive," multicultural public ones.

Keeping that kind of faith is hard enough, too, in families like Mabry's, even with social-welfare supports. AFDC and CETA are acronyms Mabry knew and lived with throughout his youth, and, within strict limits, he credits them for helping him survive. But he credits most the person who kindled his social hopes and habits, a maternal grandmother of remarkably strong character who reared him in an otherwise chaotic family. Not until Mabry was 20 did he meet his father, who'd left before his birth and denied paternity; Mabry's mother, a woefully undisciplined dreamer, inspired her son but often let him down, living with a drug dealer for five years during his youth. Yet his grandmother, who'd migrated North from a hard life of sharecropping and with whom he often lived, taught him the virtues of faith, "hard work and constancy" that were recognized and rewarded at the tradition-bound Lawrenceville School—rewarded more than they would be later in his life at over-solicitously "multicultural" institutions that couldn't seem to pay blacks the elementary human compliment of holding them to transracial standards. Although Lawrenceville admitted Mabry on full scholarship, it never tainted him with the racial paternalism and well-meant stereotyping that blacks so often meet now. Instead, it was under the school's strict and ancient regimens of honor and fairness that Mabry became one of its

top students, even while studying English literature and composition and French in rooms full of white boys who'd begun to study them before he had.

There was garden-variety racism, of course, and Mabry overlooks none of it in this narrative. But, by his own account, racial prejudice came from both sides of the color line. "White guys I didn't even know saw me as a troublemaker. Black guys I barely knew considered me an Oreo." And he tells us his own racial paranoia, not white bigotry, cost him the popularity he enjoyed among white students at first. Still, he managed to excel and make real friends whenever he heeded his grandmother's admonition to reach past racial differences and rebuffs.

If some white students were rather too inclined to mistake his pride as a token of "black rage," Lawrenceville's other black students angered him even more by refusing to "hang" with whites in their residential houses and meeting separately. Among them, he says, "I felt like a

white boy exchange student. ... They were supposed to be my boys, but I didn't feel like we had anything to say to each other, other than to complain about white people. And even that seemed empty since at least Steve Wong [an Asian-American student whom he'd befriended in his dorm] and I complained about white people we both *knew*."

Mabry's resentment of the pressure to "hang black" sometimes made him prickly enough to frighten off whites, too. At the same time, while home in his old black neighborhood during vacations, he was sometimes made to feel "like an Oreo on leave." But he had an epiphany about the limits of protective black isolationism when he and a white student who'd become a good friend agreed to let each other read their private diaries:

Back in my room, I read slowly, caressing every comma of my friend's private thoughts. ... Only occasionally did he refer to ... how I was trying to distance myself from the house's most respected members, how I seemed to be treating him with disdain because he was becoming increasingly popular. It was all true. ... I had written whole passages about how my friend had betrayed me, how it was all racially motivated.

After the exchange, the white student expressed shock that Mabry had "seen everything in racial terms, when, in fact, the house's rejection of me reflected how moody I had

become, how deliberately I had cut myself off from people, nothing racial, he said." The remainder of the exchange, as Mabry recounts, drove this point home:

"Yeah, I don't know, maybe," I replied, noting his sincerity. "I was actually really surprised that you never mentioned ... 'nigger.' ... I kept reading for it, expecting to find it."

Staring at me, his mouth dropped open. Then, with disdain, he asked, "You thought I would write that. Fuck, Marc, you *don't* know me. ... That's amazing. I wasn't raised that way," he said, now more offended than dumbfounded.

"Well, look," I said. ... "Most white people would have. That's what they say when they're pissed at a black person...."

"Bullshit, Marc. You're just so racist, you can't believe that everybody else isn't as racist as you are."

A few weeks later, the white student invited Mabry to visit his upper-crust family home, where his mother treated Mabry "like a real person, not a scholarship kid or her son's black friend." And years later, in Europe, Mabry has a similarly difficult epiphany with another white friend who, he slowly concludes, is "less prejudiced" than he is himself.

Some readers will leap to conclude that Mabry is naive or disingenuous, telling these tales only to please whites. But *White Bucks and Black-Eyed Peas* is far more convincing than that. It glosses none of whites' real hostilities

and little hypocrisies—some of them spawned, ironically, by multiculturalist "sensitizing" at Stanford that deepened racial mistrust. Yet Mabry, who became a resident adviser there and witnessed the "PC" wars firsthand, insists, rightly, in my view, that right-wing critics of multiculturalism have exaggerated its depredations. And, recounting his experiences still later at *Newsweek*, he shows how some whites—liberals and conservatives alike—casually and unconsciously box and belittle blacks.

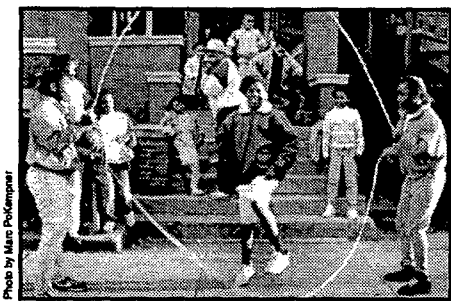
Many journalists of color feel they have a sort of missionary role to play. Our dilemma is often one of wanting to educate white Americans on minority issues and perspectives, but at the same time not be relegated to covering racial stories. ... At *Newsweek* I felt two conflicting impulses: one, to blend in and enjoy the challenges and rewards all journalists crave; the other, to set myself apart and assume the taxing role of educator. ... It is not easy for editors to deal with these conflicting desires—the same reporter who will complain about being assigned a black story one week may bitch about not being consulted on one the next. ... But, with patience and communication, I think most editors and reporters can find a mutually beneficial, flexible compromise.

At any rate, it's not as if there's an alternative. And Marcus Mabry has the courage to say so, to embrace and help build a common American culture that, when all is said and done, encompasses both his grandmother's kitchen table (never far from his thoughts) and the august dining rooms of Lawrenceville, a school he says forthrightly that he loves. At times, he confesses to confusion and self-contradiction, and he consistently abjures any pretense to speak for all blacks. Perhaps that is why, by the end of the book, one feels oneself in the presence of a young man who is free—free of white racist mind-games that have driven so many blacks to internalize the self-hatred he finds around him; free, too, of the self-haters' self-protective, but equally self-defeating, mind-games, which would have precluded the fine friendships he has made with whites.

Even as he surveys the emotional abyss in his own family and in the world beyond, Mabry has the courage to stay calm, thoughtful, and so all the more persuasively loving and moving. He's keeping the faith—a different kind of faith than race men would urge, but a faith he thinks is better for himself and his people. Even though his own unusual experience didn't push him toward *class-based* politics, such a politics clearly depends on a transracial ethos such as the one Mabry embraces. I, for one, hope he keeps hanging in there—hanging "American," that is, not "black" or "white."

Jim Sleeper, a political columnist for the *New York Daily News*, is the author of *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York*.

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FALL BOOKS



Inside the social contract

By Bonnie Smith

Is it time to start reading Rousseau again, especially in America, especially now? Critic, musician, political philosopher and novelist, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) wrote classical works about cultural values, education and social well-being. He theorized about how to improve parenting and articulated ideas of citizenship and political virtue that have remained important wherever people preferred republics to monarchies or dictatorships. Like other liberal political philosophers, he acknowledged the importance of self-interest. Unlike most of them, however, he postulated that excellence in the arts and the social order would only materialize when intellectuals and political leaders transcended selfishness and aspired to the general good.

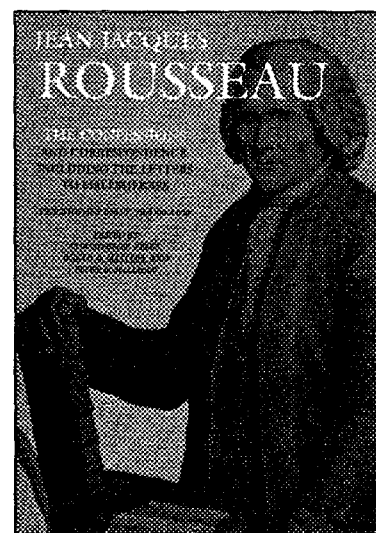
Because the good of the polity as a whole dominated so much of Rousseau's political thought, the scholar J.L. Talmon argued that his ideas were forerunners of totalitarianism, a view that became influential in the postwar period. Today, political theories based on self-interest have virtually rid public discourse of any schema for what a good society might be and have made them look quaint, naive or even pernicious. Given the rising social costs of this view, a historical encounter with Rousseau, the self-advertised exemplar of upright political conduct and proponent of the public good, might stimulate our political imaginations enough to reopen pressing issues with a Rousseauan verve.

Perhaps no single 20th-century author has had the influence among contemporaries that Rousseau had among his in the realm of political thought. Everyone from Marie Antoinette to American colonists knew who he was; representatives of church and state burned his books, while many of the century's revolutionary leaders and common folk idolized him. Written after a string of pathbreaking works of social and political theory, his *Confessions* introduces us to the man behind the furor. It's the testament of a man who seems remarkably modern in his individualism and concern

for self-image. In the *Confessions* Rousseau traces the beginning of his life in Geneva, his relationship with an older woman in Savoy who supports him during his late teens and 20s, and his fortunes as a peripatetic jack of all trades until he finally establishes himself as part of the Parisian haute intelligentsia. It's a gripping, rags-to-riches story, complete with all the self-dramatization of the self-made man. His character flaws, sensibility and good deeds all come under his own scrutiny, and like a sinning TV evangelist he tells all for the reader to admire or decry.

But Jean-Jacques' self is important not in a religious sense, as an imperfect manifestation of the divine. Rather his is a secular example to ordinary humans who will build their character and improve their abilities. Like *Emile*, his story of a young boy's education, Rousseau's autobiography shows him less as an immutable soul than as a self in process, growing progressively better, more self-confident and accomplished in response to everyday experience. The *Confessions* provides the modern individual the plot of an autonomous life.

While this acute stress on self-determination might invite comparisons with the American tradition of rugged individualism, Rousseau appears at the same time the prototypical "sensitive man." Is there any man—or woman, for that matter—who ever wept more than Rousseau? Moved by natural beauty, love, friendship or a happy event, he shed copious tears and never hesitated to note the occasion in the *Confessions*. Yet what we today might read as extravagant individual behavior had social and political import in the 18th century: It indicated the characteristics of the citizen rather than the mentality of a subject or courtier. Rousseau's sensitivity bespoke the citizen of middle-class stock who was honest with his feelings rather than cravenly toadying to royalty or the high nobility. In rushing to be near his imprisoned friend Diderot, for example, Rousseau shows how sensibility



The *Confessions* and Correspondence, Including the Letters to Malesherbes
By Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Translated by Christopher Kelly
University Press of New England
700 pp., \$60

and feeling are essential to those freely shared human bonds that form the basis of a republic. In a monarchy, as his readers well knew, a group of subjects would be held together by coercion, distinctions of rank and other artificial constraints. Empathy and generosity of feeling were integral, then, to the complex concept of freedom that developed in the Western world in the 18th century and that influenced the founding of the United States and other constitutional governments. The publicity that Rousseau gave to his feelings, like that so often mocked in today's "sensitive man," deliberately announced the arrival of a new basis for social and political interaction. A range of novel behaviors—from freely tendered acts of empathy, to socializing in cafes rather than courts, to reading a common body of sensitive literature—actually called the democratic "public" into being.

If people are unsettled by "new men" today, Europeans had no less difficulty with Rousseau, as the *Confessions* amply recounts. To escape the artificialities of Parisian high society, he moved to the country as a kind of political purification, held up, with great fanfare, for all to admire. Behaving as "Citizen" Rousseau, he maintained a strict honesty in personal relationships, showing that he was no longer merely good but principled and thus virtuous—the chief characteristic of republican action. Duchesses and princes were supposed to benefit from this abundant honesty in his dealings with them, but they did not necessarily take to it. In a moment of extreme self-restraint, Frederick the Great in 1763 simply ignored an unsolicited bit of advice from Rousseau that, having done well in the Seven Years War, he devote himself to the arts of peace and public welfare.

But ordinary people also had to put up with Rousseau. Having moved to the outskirts of Neuchâtel in the 1760s, he took exclusively to wearing Armenian costume—including a long caftan instead of shirt and trousers so that he could receive daily medical treatment more efficiently. Peasants stoned his house, but instead of switching to something more conventional, Rousseau felt it behooved civic manliness not to succumb to fashion. He also found ordinary human interaction in the artificial society of the day, in which people talked "about the weather and the flies that are flying around," to be wasteful. So he took to making lace when anyone paid him a social call; the finished product he gave to society women who agreed to breast-feed their children themselves instead of sending them off to a wet nurse for several years.

This bargain neatly captures a further gendering of Rousseau's republic of virtue. If the *Confessions* shows the "new man" at his inception, it also gives some idea of his role in the fashioning of a "new motherhood." Although his new man has taken two centuries to evolve and arguably has yet to arrive, his "new motherhood" is already today called "traditional." Rousseau advocated a sentimental, domestic role for women as wives and mothers, wherein they would shed the artificialities of fashion and salon life for the work that nature, he said, has assigned them. He advised lower- and middle-class women to stop sending

their children to wet nurses, which they did in order to free themselves up to help their husbands in the family business or artisanal work. Instead, they should spend their time caring for and educating those children to be citizens.

According to Rousseau, this arrangement would allow men to become men again. Instead of serving as dandified courtiers, they would protect their domesticated family and, as a group of brothers, form the citizenry. Women and children, meanwhile, would stay at home. Rousseau railed against women authors, politically powerful women of the court, and culturally influential women of the Parisian literary and philosophical world.

The basis of his republic of letters and of law was thus overwhelmingly male. Yet women of Rousseau's day came to embrace the idea of this new motherhood, because, for one thing, it charged them with the solemn duties of molding minds and influencing the state by forming its citizens. Moreover, in Rousseau's world, relations between husbands and wives would have at their base not only traditional economic interests, family connections and titles, but mutual good feeling and even love as well. As companions, albeit unequal, to their husbands and shapers of the next generation, women would have a right, even a need, for education.

Of course, Rousseau himself, as he elaborates in the *Confessions*, put his own five children in a foundling hospital where the mortality rate was more than 70 percent. Their mother, the laundress Thérèse Levasseur, could barely read and write, thus implicitly making her a bad choice for republican motherhood. Moreover, their father explained that the state could best educate his brood in the ways of citizenship and honest work. He did not want his children to be corrupted by growing up in a family immersed in Parisian literary life. In the *Confessions*, just as in today's political climate, "social engineering" rationalizations for separating children from their mothers (in the case of Rousseau's family, from a mother who desperately wanted to keep them but who wanted to keep her man even more) accompany encomia to sentimental motherhood.

As Rousseau establishes the basis for much modern thinking on the gender division of labor, he draws us into a dense emotional life—one that casts a revealing light on the modern sensibility. Aside from the Enlightenment-era maxims on human improvement, the *Confessions* depicts a nightmare world, a Kafkaesque fantasy in which a father gives his children up to the state, in which the worthy author is tormented by a cabal of society women who have enlisted the aid of the court and powerful men, chasing down the eccentric but honest thinker and driving him finally into exile.

Rousseau's fantasies raise issues of how our complex modernity is constructed emotionally. The obsession with self-disclosure, some might argue, triggers a modern anxiety about failure in this task and thus condemns the individual to perpetual fears of persecution and punishment. This new translation, the fifth volume in a project to translate all of Rousseau from the official French Pléiade edition, nicely

captures not only the many practical and political precepts in the *Confessions*, but also this attendant haunted turn in Rousseau's psyche. Priests and novices try to corrupt him sexually, while his beloved Madame de Warens takes him into her bed, living with him and her steward in a ménage à trois whose threat to individualistic masculinity resonates throughout the *Confessions*. To escape the predatory "mothers" who torment him, Rousseau abandons himself to the alternative good woman by hiding in the country, throwing himself along the banks of streams: "Oh nature, oh my mother, here I am under your protection alone." Nature, the mother who breast-feeds us and allows us to creep back into a carefree childhood, provides a respite from civilization and pursuit. Rousseau's depiction of these extraordinary and contradictory fantasies of womanhood—castrating and purifying—provides vivid contributions to the modern political imagination that accompanied the birth of republicanism and citizenship in his political theory.

This emotional seducer of his readers, this citizen and rational theorist, continues his virtuoso performance with visions of pure delight, depicting his slowly developing passion for musical composition or contemplating the idle virtues of solitude.

To enhance the pleasure of reading Rousseau, this edition relegates notes on textual variations and biographical and historical information to the back of the book. Ordinary readers will appreciate this feature, though literary scholars may not. But one assumes that scholars would read the *Confessions* in the original anyway, while the ordinary reader will want to savor the story, even its final—and to today's mentality, unfashionable—message. Having written great classics of the century, Rousseau ends his tale in exile, pursued and betrayed by powerful but false friends, eking out a living through deals with publishers and patrons. The *Confessions* as a whole traces a continuous thread of misfortune, along with Rousseau's own dismal revelations of character faults, and accounts of shockingly bad deeds he has done to the innocent. The message here is also political, and it was one that Rousseau shared in part with the eminent jurist Montesquieu, whose *Spirit of the Laws* gave the American Founding Fathers much of their blueprint for constitutional government. In evaluating the accomplishments and style of monarchs and courtiers of their time, both Rousseau and Montesquieu saw good fortune and wealth as hindrances to the development of political virtue, the conduct of good government and the discernment of truth. Wealth and good fortune hid and corrupted the essential decency of humans, making for bad government and falsehood. The unfortunate and even impoverished members of society were the better bearers of civic values, because in them humanity stood unencumbered and undistorted.

Such a message would hardly gain approval today, especially among Americans, who for the most part have wealth beyond the imaginings of the average 18th-century European and who face different political issues. Contrary to 18th-century observations, official wisdom holds today that



the rich and powerful are the worthiest people in society; workers and the poor make little difference, at best, and are routinely regarded as positively bad. While Rousseau's dictates on gender inequality have become familiar features of modern life, his positive association of virtue with ordinary citizenry has met a different fate. These paradoxical understandings of the Western republican heritage still await our serious attention.

◀
Bonnie Smith is a professor of history at Rutgers University and co-author of *The Challenge of the West: Peoples and Cultures from the Stone Age to the Global Age* (D.C. Heath, 1995).

FALLBOOKS



Of human suffrage

By Phyllis Eckhaus

Alice Paul, famed women's suffrage leader and author of the Equal Rights Amendment, had piles of dirty laundry—literally. "In boxes," reported my mother, who knew Paul in the mid-1970s, when the aging suffragist was living in my Connecticut hometown.

I think of that laundry when I read accounts of suffrage history. During this anniversary year—the 19th Amendment turned 75 this August—there's a special temptation to place suffrage leaders on a pedestal, as though to prevent history from trampling them underfoot. But great leaders aren't perfect people, and their most important victories sometimes result from sordid strategies. For historians, the challenge is not to ignore dirty laundry but to put it in perspective.

Three new books on the women's suffrage movement help provide that perspective. *Jailed for Freedom*, a memoir by suffragist Doris Stevens, focuses on the last turbulent years of the campaign for the 19th Amendment. *One Woman, One Vote*, a collection of essays by contemporary historians, provides an overview of the whole movement. *Failure Is Impossible* returns to the movement's roots, portraying the suffrage cause through the words of Susan B. Anthony and her contemporaries.

In the mid-19th century, when the suffrage campaign began, women were barred from public life. Even to speak in a public forum—conduct ordinary or honorable for men—was a huge transgression. When Susan B. Anthony, a schoolteacher, sought the floor at an 1853 state teachers' convention, the men debated half an hour before they agreed to let a woman speak. Though women at the convention outnumbered men three to two, they played no public role; many were mortified by Anthony's request.

For a woman to assert her own interests was especially outrageous. While male self-interest was hailed as the engine driving economic progress, women's supposed selflessness was thought to provide a sort of social safety net, protecting home and hearth. Give a woman the ballot, and she would become "unsexed" through the exercise of independent

judgment; domestic life would be destroyed.

By the turn of the century, 50 years into the suffrage movement, women's public activity was tolerated, though only as an outgrowth of their concern for home and family. Suffragists prized their hard-won entry into the mainstream. Socialites, club members and the Women's Christian Temperance Union sought the ballot "for home protection."

This backdrop helps explain why the confrontational tactics of the National Woman's Party so upset mainstream suffragists. Enraged at Woodrow Wilson's haughty indifference to the suffrage campaign, Alice Paul's small band of militants sought to embarrass the president into action. They repeatedly picketed the White House and were thrown into jail, sometimes for as long as six months, for "obstructing traffic." Refusing to eat, they were isolated, beaten and forcibly fed. Paul was examined for a "persecution complex" and consigned to a psychiatric ward.

Mainstream suffragists loathed Paul's tactics. Historians dispute the impact of her campaign, which may have played the rhetorical "bad cop" to the softer "good cop" strategies of the suffragist mainstream.

But there's no disputing the heroism of Paul and her troops, among them Doris Stevens. Stevens' powerful 1920 memoir of the campaign, *Jailed for Freedom*, has just been

revised and reissued by NewSage Press. This edition brings to a new generation the thrilling tale of a few respectable women so committed to justice that they temporarily became enemies of the state.

Hindsight, contrary to cliché, does not confer 20/20 vision. Thus, while Stevens loyally assigns Paul credit for the vote, historians of the suffrage struggle differ dramatically among themselves. Often, their assessments of suffrage leaders tell



Failure Is Impossible: Susan B. Anthony in Her Own Words
By Lynn Sherr

Times Books, 384 pp., \$23

One Woman, One Vote:
Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement
Edited by Marjorie Spruill Wheeler
NewSage Press, 388 pp., \$18.95

Jailed for Freedom: American Women Win the Vote
By Doris Stevens; edited by Carol O'Hare
NewSage Press, 220 pp., \$12.95

more about the historian than about the historical record.

The 19 essays collected in *One Woman, One Vote* are so different in outlook, so various in their approach even to the same sources, that readers are compelled to read critically and come to their own conclusions. Many of the articles are revisionist histories that would be fascinating unto themselves. But when all these pieces are read together, the clamor of lively voices makes this collection the intellectual equivalent of a great, raucous party.

Transcending the impulse to "celebrate" our foremothers by sanitizing their past, *One Woman, One Vote* also boasts an ample supply of scabrous detail. Especially outré is the story of Victoria Woodhull, perhaps the queen of dirty laundry. Woodhull, a beautiful ex-prostitute and outspoken advocate of "free love," suddenly came into enough money to finance her own brokerage firm after she and her sister Tennessee Claflin—both active spiritualists—had a "magnetic healing session" in 1868 with railroad magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt. The enterprising sisters put their profits into *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, a popular scandal sheet, which they used to blackmail potential targets.

During Woodhull's brief flirtation with propriety, she became the first woman to address a committee of Congress, making an eloquent suffrage speech before the House Judiciary Committee in 1871. Susan B. Anthony promptly invited her onto the convention platform of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

Anthony was soon sorry. Woodhull attempted to hijack the 1872 NAWSA convention to announce her candidacy for the United States presidency, and Anthony, desperate to shut her up, was forced to douse the gas lights in the convention hall. The sisters later married respectably in England, where Claflin became Lady Cook and sent thousands of dollars back to the States to support Paul's National Woman's Party.

The histories offered in *One Woman, One Vote* suggest an important point, one that resounds far beyond the community of feminist activists, then and now: the indispensable nature of the practical, and sometimes unsightly, art of political compromise. The political outsider has the luxury of remaining true to principle. But once one is invited inside, one is obliged to make hard choices. Suffragists touted their "Front Door Lobby"—their alleged refusal to resort to backroom political deals—yet many of their most important victories were rooted in crass compromise. Thus, for example, suffrage leader Minnie Cunningham gained women the vote in Texas in 1918 through down-and-dirty horse trades that would have made Lyndon Johnson beam with pride. As her part of the bargain, Cunningham promised the women's vote to an ineffectual governor who had (just barely) agreed to support suffrage.

Feminists who would condemn such deals, preferring women to remain above the sleazy political fray, may be interested to know that their position was anticipated long ago—by women of the anti-suffrage forces. During the last phase of the suffrage struggle, these "Antis" came around to advocating women's participation in public life. But they

warned that women's civilizing contribution would be utterly undermined once women fell prey to partisan politics.

Not surprisingly, some of the dirty laundry uncovered in *One Woman, One Vote* is racist. White women, eager for the support of Southern Democrats, constantly sacrificed the interests of women of color. In Texas, black women were refused admission to the state's suffrage organization. In California, Latinas were recruited while Asian women were scorned. When the National Woman's Party marched through the streets of Washington, D.C., white organizers tried to force black suffrage leader Ida B. Wells-Barnett to the back of the line. Wells-Barnett—who once bit the hand of a train conductor who sought to railroad her into a Jim Crow car—refused and marched with white suffragists from her home state of Illinois.

Some essayists in *One Woman, One Vote* imply that Susan B. Anthony's vehement opposition to the 14th and 15th Amendments, granting the vote to black men but not women, was a racist embarrassment to womankind.

But they're wrong. As Lynn Sherr documents in her superb book, *Failure Is Impossible*, Anthony was raised an abolitionist. The great abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass was a family friend. Anthony risked imprisonment as an "engineer" on the underground railroad, and her brothers joined John Brown's Kansas raids. In later years, when Anthony's white secretary refused to take dictation from Wells-Barnett, then a guest in Anthony's home, Anthony fired the secretary.

Sherr, a television reporter, excerpts pithy "soundbites" from the public record, and her presentation of the debate over the Reconstruction Amendments is especially compelling. Douglass argued that only when women were "dragged from their homes and hung on lamp-posts" because of their sex would they "have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own." For Anthony, however, the amendments—which expressly linked voting rights to gender for the first time—were an intolerable betrayal.

One need not agree with Anthony's position to realize that it was grounded in principle, not prejudice. She and Elizabeth Cady Stanton put women's interests first, at a time when no one else did. In their uncompromising militance, they foreshadowed Malcolm X's fight for black liberation "by any means necessary." Can any movement succeed without at least a few leaders and followers who consider their cause to be of paramount importance?

Though righteous leftists sometimes profess to know the answers, there is no sure-fire way to achieve social change. Suffrage history teaches many things, among them a need for a vast multitude of strategies. One never knows what will work, and, amazingly, even bad strategies sometimes produce good consequences. There's room for all approaches—radical, mainstream, principled, expedient.

What's important is to keep trying. Or, as Susan B. Anthony observed, "All we can do is to agitate, agitate, agitate." ◀ Phyllis Eckhaus, a Brooklyn-based writer, votes regularly.

FALLBOOKS



Eggheads on the infobahn

By Gary Chapman

Five years ago, Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility organized a panel discussion at Harvard University on "virtual reality." One of the panelists was William Bricken, then the head of the University of Washington's Human Interface Technology Laboratory and a "VR" guru. In the middle of Bricken's talk, he was suddenly and unexpectedly overcome by a fit of weeping. The audience, taken aback, was briefly alarmed and concerned, then embarrassed. Bricken was apparently seized with joy, erupting in tears over the sublime experience of the technology he was developing. Virtual technology was, for Bricken, beautiful enough to cry about.

The excitement over virtual reality (VR) technology may actually have passed its peak five years ago when Nicole Stenger, also a speaker on the Harvard panel, told the audience that she believed there would soon be a discussion on whether we will need a constitutional amendment guaranteeing citizens the right to know whether they were experiencing "virtual" or real life. More recently, Hasbro, the toy manufacturer, announced that it was abandoning its planned VR technologies because they would be too expensive for consumers. Right now, what we call VR technologies, such as cyber-helmets and "data gloves" designed to simulate the user's presence inside a computer landscape, are limited to arcade games and military experiments. There are a few starry-eyed savants, such as Stenger and a group of California visionaries called "Extropians," who predict that we'll all one day live in cyberspace more than we will live in the real world. But this claim hasn't seemed to grab the imaginations or the pocketbooks of most American consumers.

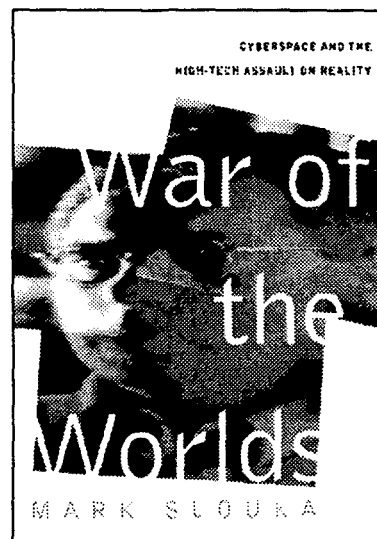
Mark Slouka, however, author of *War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-Tech Assault on Reality*, argues that the encroachment by "virtual," or simulated, reality on

real life is already well under way and growing more dangerous every day. Citing TV docudramas, political spin campaigns, theme parks, ersatz "grass-roots" lobbying sponsored by corporations and a host of other fakeries, Slouka warns that, "More and more of us, whether we realize it or not, accept the copy as original. Increasingly removed from experience, overdependent on representations of reality that come to us through television and the print media, we seem more and more willing to put our trust in intermediaries who 're-present' the world to us." Slouka, who lectures on literature and culture at the University of California at San Diego, sees the ultimate danger in computerized VR technologies that will eventually "re-present" the world to us in a fashion so enveloping and convincing that many of us will prefer the simulated world to the real one we inhabit.

Slouka begins with what might be a disclaimer: "This is a personal book." It certainly reads like one,

which is not necessarily a fault. It's essentially the long monologue of a person disturbed by all the hype about the Internet, virtual reality, digitized consciousness and so on: all the themes of *Wired* magazine, gassy newspaper features and academic panel discussions. Unfortunately for Slouka, most of his objections have been covered before, and better, in Theodore Roszak's 1986 book, *The Cult of Information*, and in a classic, scorching essay with the memorable title of "Departure of the Body Snatchers, or the Confessions of a Carbon Chauvinist," by David Lavery, published in the *Hudson Review* in the same year.

The deeper problem with Slouka's very personal book is that the author doesn't draw on many of the intellectual



War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-Tech Assault on Reality

By Mark Slouka
BasicBooks
185 pp., \$20

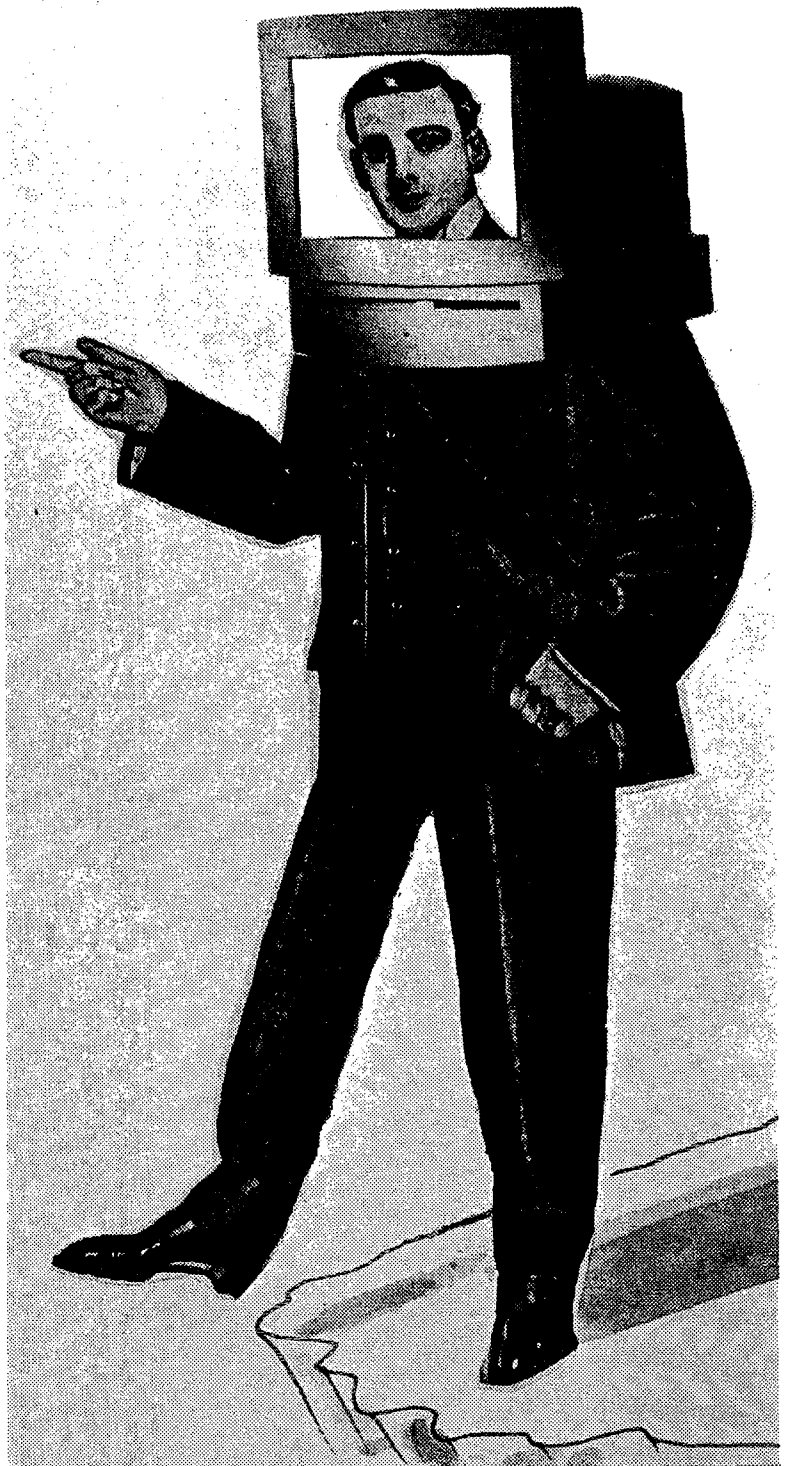
Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information

Edited by James Brook and Iain A. Boal
City Lights
278 pp., \$15.95

resources he could have used to counter the hypesters of the “digerati”—resources supplied by such thinkers as Herbert Marcuse, Lewis Mumford, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, among others. Howard Rheingold, the author of the 1993 book *The Virtual Community*, which Slouka criticizes, actually did a better job of covering the deep, weighty objections of these thinkers than Slouka does. So even when readers are sympathetic to Slouka’s case for “essentialism” and nature over simulated environments, they are left wishing that he’d pick up a bigger and better hammer.

Altogether a deeper and more interesting book, *Resisting the Virtual Life* squarely tackles the corporate ideology behind “digital culture.” Edited by James Brook, a Silicon Valley writer, and Iain A. Boal, a professor of the history of technology at the University of California at Berkeley, this collection of essays delves deeper into the details of high-tech culture and, by relying on true activists as contributors, manages to get down to the nuts and bolts of effective dissent—something Slouka never quite delivers. It also includes some real gems of writing such as Ellen Ullman’s description of programmers and Rebecca Solnit’s engaging portrait of Silicon Valley. Nearly all of the contributors to *Resisting the Virtual Life* write authoritatively about their subjects and with an almost tangible contempt for the claims of high-tech ideologists. Herbert Schiller flays multinational corporations and what he describes as an imperialist “information superhighway.” Iain Boal writes about the “machinery of domination,” employing the kind of language Slouka can’t bring himself to use. Slouka feels obligated to point out he isn’t against technology; Boal, on the other hand, celebrates the Luddite “critique” of technology (critique meaning smashing machines). Laura Miller describes how the Internet is just another incarnation of the sexist media culture women have struggled against for decades. R. Dennis Hayes describes, in painful detail, the physical injuries, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, entailed in using computers on a daily basis. In other words, this book is a steam hammer compared to Slouka’s gentle, troubled objections.

Discrepancies aside, the simple existence of these two books raises an interesting question. Why is it that so many intellectuals are so obsessed with advanced information technologies and “digital culture” these days? Slouka’s cast of characters—Kevin Kelly of *Wired* magazine, professional virtual reality researcher Nicole Stenger, one-time Grateful Dead lyricist and technonerd John Perry Barlow, etc.—all say clever and hyperbolic things guaranteed to find their way into print. (Kelly and Barlow were the pro-



computer panelists in a recent *Harper's* magazine forum.) But why, in the middle of what can only be described as an intensifying class war, does a self-described leftist like Slouka pay so much attention to people who say goofy and outrageous things about what life will be like in the future? Even Slouka seems to have his doubts about the importance of the computer prophets he discusses: Periodically he asks the reader questions like, “Should we take this seriously?”

Slouka, who always answers yes, provides only partial support for his claim. He says that one source of all the fantastic and dreamy talk about virtual reality is the marriage of computers and deconstructionism, "a union of monsters if there ever was one." The ethos and language of deconstructionism began to settle into academic institutions about the time that VR technologies started to interest people other than computer scientists, among them artists, humanists and cultural theorists. Very quickly, intellectual talk about computers became as fractured and opaque as talk about "texts" had been 10 years earlier. And there was a new vogue for untethered speculations about how scrambled consciousness could become with VR technologies. Out of the jumbled jargon of deconstructionism came a fascination with the cryptic bon mot, such as the title to one of Stenger's essays on technology and the brain, "The Mind is a Leaking Rainbow." This trend in language and the claims for VR's mind-bending powers attracted veterans of the hippie drug scene, such as Timothy Leary. And in fact, many of VR's evangelicals, including Jaron Lanier, William Bricken and Howard Rheingold, are visually and temperamentally products of the hippie era. Like the Deadhead wordsmith Barlow, the digerati who have prospered and been elevated to near star status have been those who have been especially clever and quick with loopy aphorisms.

Deconstructionism, meanwhile, completed the divorce of academic intellectuals from the working class, a marriage that was always rocky and that lasted only about 100 years.

After deconstructionism swept through U.S. universities (imported, like cheese, from France), very few people, even the participants themselves, could understand what intellectuals were saying or thinking. The world's meaning became a puzzle with no ultimate design. Like everything else, the working class was reduced to a mindless symbol.

All of this confusion was perfect preparation for an ideology of "virtualness." With intellectuals severed from the workaday struggles of most people in society, they were free to waltz off into a virtual domain of discourse, where everything was possible and nothing outside really mattered. Antonio Gramsci's idea of an "organic intellectual" was abandoned. VR is a domain in which the organic is literally left behind, along with all constraints of rationality, anatomy, society or politics. And since VR technologies don't actually work the way their adherents promise, the field is essentially one of pure, uninhibited blather.

Ultimately, what's frustrating about *War of the Worlds* is not Slouka's argument against the ideology of "virtualness," but the fact that many intellectuals, like Slouka, are so disengaged from the political and economic crisis in this country that they say things that would make their predecessors roll their eyes. Rather than complain about the flaccid, passive experience of watching TV, modern intellectuals would do well to examine the economic system that enervates people so much that they don't have the energy to do anything else. In this context, Slouka's concern about the danger that VR poses to children (who may not be able to distinguish

what's real from what's simulated) seems peripheral; in a time when inner-city children are dying on the streets from real bullet wounds, his focus on the hazards of virtual violence misses the mark. Moreover, when middle-class kids are growing up warped by parental neglect, suburban banality, bad schools and poor job prospects, protecting them from computer games becomes irrelevant.

Resisting the Virtual Life provides welcome relief from this sort of short-sightedness. The contributors are not only good writers; they understand that you don't have to ignore information technologies to be a dissident, nor do you have to take all the claims of the digital ideologists seriously. In an era when the term "Luddite" is likely to replace "communist" as the ultimate political epithet, *Resisting the Virtual Life* shows how citizens can both live with and challenge technology and its power.

Gary Chapman is coordinator of the 21st Century Project at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.

ROUTLEDGE

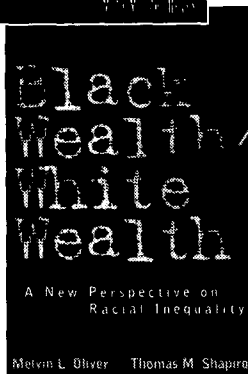


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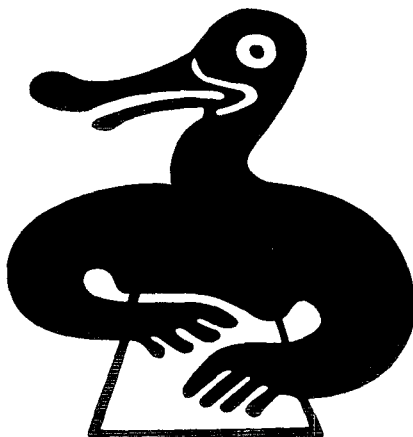
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FALL BOOKS



Marginal notes

By K. E. Fleming

The academy and its imitators have long been fascinated with the concepts of liminality and marginality. Gender studies (or rather, women's studies, its precursor) took the baton early and by now has generated a vast corpus of material explaining the experience of femaleness as one that exists on the margins of "mainstream" culture. This liminality, as many feminists have argued, can bring a sense of exclusion and devaluation but also a feeling of liberation and freedom. Liberation, in this view of things, derives from being excluded not just from many of society's central arenas, but also from many of its constraining expectations. Eccentricity, for example, and even insanity, have received serious academic treatment as liberating or transformative conditions insofar as they permit people to engage in behaviors otherwise deemed inappropriate or untenable.

Resident Alien, as its title suggests, reflects the long-standing feminist interest in the liminal. Janet Wolff, a professor of art history at the University of Rochester, charts the various forms of marginality, alienness, exclusion and estrangement that characterize and shape the female experience. She is particularly preoccupied with the concept of travel and its permutations: tourism, exile and immigration. This latter state is one Wolff finds especially evocative, since she herself is a British "resident alien" in America.

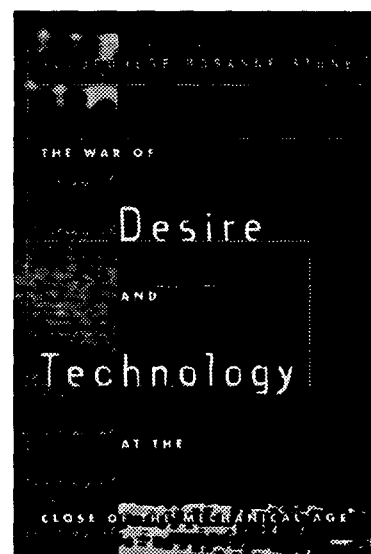
Such metaphor-laden material seems a promising lens through which the vision of female experience at the margins can be extended. Wolff's book, however, is a collection of essays so thinly connected as to be lacking in coherence and so hopelessly full of earnest, cutting-edge academic jargon as to be alternately infuriating and amusing.

Wolff's argumentation, too, is less than compelling. On the one hand, she frequently seems to be stating the obvious, albeit in long and tedious terms. She contends, for instance, that the metaphor of dance—widely used in our culture to indicate freedom, spontaneity, rebellion and unfettered emotional release—is largely inappropriate in the context of

feminist cultural criticism, since dance is, in reality, usually controlled, choreographed and decidedly deliberate. Interesting, perhaps, as an aside, but hardly an insight worthy of the full chapter Wolff accords it.

On the other hand, Wolff's discussions can be so opaque as to read almost like parody. *Resident Alien* seems at times to be a literary version of Los Angeles' Museum of Jurassic Technology, which dupes its visitors into thinking that the objects on display are actual artifacts of history, when in truth, the emperor has no clothes—the museum and its contents are empty signifiers, recalling an age that never was. So, too, with Wolff's undigested critical analysis of such massive and disparate topics as travel, death and rock 'n' roll; the feeling of incipient disbelief is deepened by Wolff's peculiar penchant for the nonsensical. "[D]estabilizing," she observes at one point, "has to be *situated*, if the critic is not to self-destruct in the process [of destabilizing]." Such observations, while possessed of a certain endearingly inscrutable, koan-like quality, are a bit too slick and meaningless to provoke serious reflection. In fetishizing the liminal, Wolff seems to have drained it of any but the most private, elliptical significance.

Recently, the fascination with cultural margins has been transposed into the realm of the Internet, which is both a liminal area unto itself (where, after all, is cyberspace?) and one that allows its denizens to elude many traditional social boundaries. The new technologies hold the potential (according to one's point of view) to liberate their users by opening up dramatic new modes of information-gathering and communication or to imprison them in an elaborate simulacrum of actual knowledge and community.



The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age
By Allucquère Rosanne Stone
MIT Press
212 pp., \$22.50

Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism
By Janet Wolff
Yale University Press
156 pp., \$22.50

By now these two views of the Net have become polarized into warring camps: the neo-Luddites, who regard cyberspace as a horrific gathering of pornographers, child molesters and McLuhanesque ciphers; and Net celebrants, who often use their own quasi-millennial rhetoric to describe the "transformative" and "liberating" powers of life online.

Allucquère Rosanne Stone, a professor in the department of radio, TV and film at the University of Texas, enters this minefield of opinion with some bracing, if not always finely wrought, insights. Like many modish Net observers, Stone stresses the frequency of virtual cross-dressing among online users. Liminality, as it pertains to gender, asserts itself forthrightly in cyberspace: the user can decide for him or herself what (if any) gender identity to have online. According to some, of course, this simply means that the user can lie and that such acts of virtual transvestism are nothing more than sophisticated variants of a crank call. But to others—including Stone—this gender fluidity allows for a liberating (and much-welcome) transgression of the gender boundaries of the "real" world; boundaries that, it could be argued, are no less constructed than those of cyberspace. Whatever the theory, the practice apparently is widespread; estimates of logged-on cross-dressers in Japan run as high as 20 percent.

The proliferation of gender-bending on the Net points up a much larger quandary: "communication" has ceased to be what we knew it as or, at least, has become something much more than it had been. No longer needed, for instance, is a body (not that the phone required one either, but at least with that we had a voice). "Space," too, has been redefined, not merely as something physical, but as a communications concept. The question is, is this a "good" thing or a "bad" thing? Should we rejoice or mourn our physicality? What is shaping up here, in other words, is nothing less than a good old-fashioned Greco-Roman debate over the body. Is some essential part of us inextricably bound to our physical being? If not, what is "real"?

The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age is (among other things) Stone's effort to render the acute liminality of the Net's virtual community in feminist terms. By exploring the gender-bound significations of the new technologies, Stone is updating a method that had been a hallmark of the postmodern academy even before the advent of the online era. Theorists of gender and the body have for some time argued for an understanding of the body not as an ontological "fact," but rather as a social construction, the artificially mediated product of elaborate "discourses" of power and social control.

The totalizing terms of this analysis share obvious affinities with the sprawling, brave new communities of cyberspace. Indeed, the most significant characteristic of the Net is that it, too, has no sole identifiable source, identity or reality. It, like Foucault's power, is the product of collective, often unintentional and unknown effort.

In the face of such inapprehensible omnipresence, those who would judge the online realm in moralistic terms seem hopelessly naive, and not a little idealistic. For such terms, of course, imply agency and intentionality, concepts that are elusive in society as we now understand it. Add to this an intellectual climate largely given over to cultural relativism, and such value judgments seem not just futile but absurd.

Yet this is precisely where Stone's quirky study performs a valuable service. Stone manages to work within the terms of the postmodern academy *and* to brave some value judgments about the implications of the online era. It is a self-consciously postmodern book, at times tediously and cutesily so. Stone is in the habit of footnoting herself, for instance, in order to warn her reader to be alert to her tendency to conflate fact with fiction, and to regard with skepticism her various authorial assumptions.

Stone is stopped short, however, of being intolerably precious by her own formidable intellect and considerable powers of written expression. And unlike most commentators on cyberspace, she benefits from a relentless refusal to see her subject in black and white terms.

Stone clearly understands that there is a huge difference between virtual and "real" reality (a point too often lost on technophiles and technophobes alike). Quite rightly, for instance, she sides with those who feel that "rape" should be "a privileged term, referring to physical violation in physically grounded circumstances—that is, when no logging off is possible." This hints, of course, at the criticism—and it is a trenchant one—that virtual reality degrades human experience.

Unlike the neo-Luddites, however, Stone does not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Retaining an obvious infatuation with the worlds of cyberspace, Stone manages nevertheless to reflect thoughtfully and responsibly about the future implications of an online world, and even allows that we might have the ability to shape that world. One can but hope she is right and that we will not all be made liminal by the technologies upon which we depend. ◀

K. E. Fleming is a freelance writer based in Santa Monica, Calif.

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FALL BOOKS



The academy in peril

By John K. Wilson

The battle over the true political nature of the academy, once a skirmish around the words "political correctness," is settling into a permanent, irreconcilable war. And as it has worn on, the theater has widened: The focus on curricular requirements and campus speech codes has opened onto the larger question of the university's role in society at large. Recent books from across the political spectrum—Richard Bernstein's *Dictatorship of Virtue*, Russell Jacoby's *Dogmatic Wisdom*, Gerald Graff's *Beyond the Culture Wars*, to name a few—all bear witness to the increasing degree to which the PC wars overlap with disputes in American culture and politics more generally.

As a result, Americans may well start to regard the clash over higher education much the same way they look upon other cultural flare-ups: as a fixed flash-point of opinion, forever beyond resolution, generating endless high-minded rhetoric and opportunistic punditry. But before the whole issue gets consigned to the margins of public attention, it's worth taking a fresh look at what is really at stake in the politics of the university.

Two recent books offer an opportunity to do just that. In *Zealotry and Academic Freedom*, Neil Hamilton, a professor at the William Mitchell School of Law in St. Paul, Minn., offers what is by now a very familiar defense of the tradition of academic freedom, now under siege (in his view) from the shrill ideological attacks of the academic left. In *Leasing the Ivory Tower*, Lawrence Soley, a communications professor at Marquette University, offers a bracing antidote to the seemingly exhausted terms of the PC debate by directing attention to the real masters of the university: the corporate funders, alumni donors and conservative think tanks whose economic and social aims are ensconced so firmly in the institutional life of American universities that their influence escapes serious questioning and debate altogether.

Hamilton's book covers much of the ground worked by other anti-PC polemicists, such as Dinesh D'Souza, Roger Kimball and Gertude Himmelfarb. Hamilton's study is noteworthy, however, for its exhaustiveness: Hamilton carefully details virtually every anecdote about the evils of the academic left. He also offers something that has been missing from

the other PC attacks: a sense of history. He provides a useful history of academic freedom from the religious control over early colleges to the McCarthy era. But while much of this earlier material focuses on the threats to academic freedom issuing from the right, beginning with the 1960s, Hamilton turns sharply against the left, depicting the decade's student movements as a vast network of repression, extinguishing conservative views and academic freedom.

Hamilton attacks administrators for "capitulation to the demands of the students" and concludes that "many faculty members lost all courage to stand up for academic freedom and face people who had primal passion." By adopting this framework, Hamilton is forced to rewrite the history of the 1960s as an era of total domination by left-wing zealots. In the process he ignores the student protesters expelled, beaten and, in a few cases, killed; he also fails to note that leftist professors were often fired for participating in protests. For all the violence and excesses of the left during the 1960s, a much greater threat to academic freedom came from administrators who held the official power and used it to suppress the left. Hamilton does not merely minimize this part of 1960s history; he omits it altogether.

As it moves into the present day, Hamilton's book veers into the familiar terrain of innuendo and half-truths that makes up most anti-PC diatribes. Yet the book is useful in one other respect: It supplies a case study in the folly of remedying alleged ideological excesses with a narrow ideological agenda of controlling the political content of speech on campus—ironically, one of the charges conservative critics routinely levy against the campus left. While Hamilton is careful to hedge his proposed pedagogical reforms with the disclaimer that they are neutral, they can only promote a university life that (at best) is cravenly depoliticized and (at worst) is deeply hostile to all inquiry that can be remotely perceived as a threat to received conservative opinion. Hamilton argues, for example, that professors should be prohibited from teaching "political topics that have no relation to the subject," claiming



**Leasing the Ivory Tower:
The Corporate Takeover
of Academia**

By Lawrence C. Soley
South End Press
204 pp., \$13

**Zealotry and
Academic Freedom**

By Neil Hamilton
Transaction
424 pp., \$34.95

unconvincingly that this is a much “clearer” rule than those instituted under anti-harassment codes. And in response to the “politicization of the classroom” (whatever that may mean), Hamilton seems to ditch academic freedom entirely, instead urging students to “raise concerns,” about, faculty to “investigate” and universities to “prohibit” political speech.

But such vigilance from the academic right is hardly necessary, as Richard Soley makes clear: The university and its leaders are already on board. The distant discord of ideological battles in campus life is no match for the steady drumbeat of corporate funding and alumni donations.

Take the case of Boston University President John Silber, in many ways the dream administrator for the academic right. Soley describes how Silber attracted such right-wing “scholarly” enterprises as the Center for Defense Journalism, the Disinformation Documentation Center, and the Institute for the Study of Ideology, Conflict and Policy. In 1987, Boston University got a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. Information Agency to teach journalism to Afghan rebels in Pakistan. When Silber insisted on the propaganda project, the head of the college of communications resigned and was replaced by H. Joaquim Maitre, a right-wing friend of Silber with no academic credentials in the field. Meanwhile, Silber has attacked leftist professors, declaring that Boston University has “resisted” the multiculturalists, deconstructionists and “revisionist history.” As Boston University professor Howard Zinn points out in his recent memoir, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, Silber has left behind a long trail of dismissed leftists as evidence of that “resistance.”

Soley argues that university presidents such as Silber show how universities are no longer academic institutions, but massive corporations headed by profit-minded CEOs. And like those CEOs, college presidents increasingly take on the protective coloration of the marketplace. Although few presidents are as venomously anti-liberal as Silber, many have aggressively promoted the recent growth of corporate control and research on campus.

This influence inevitably shapes the way research is conducted, as well. According to Soley, “Corporations and their foundations have become sacred cows to university administrators. Few professors are willing to jeopardize their standing in universities by publishing research articles critical of these donors.” A vast number of professors, indeed, seem willing to sell their academic soul to the highest bidder; particularly without shame are the business professors who compose journal articles claiming that no link can be demonstrated between advertising and smoking, while neglecting to note that cigarette companies have hired them on as paid consultants. Bought research, however, is a mild offense compared to the many endowed professorships explicitly established to pursue a pro-business agenda. To promote free-market economics and oppose government regulation, right-wing donors have funded more than 100 “free enterprise chairs” at American colleges since 1980, Soley reports. And more informal arrangements, such as far-flung grant

disbursements, produce a pleasing ideological homogeneity at a number of campuses. To cite just one example, the John M. Olin Foundation lavishes millions each year on law programs across the country devoted to the free-market school of legal interpretation known as “law and economics.”

The right has also gone beyond the university per se to develop its own institutions to provide pseudo-academic public policy research promoting its political goals. These think tanks (and their financing from conservative foundations) have grown dramatically in recent years. As Soley points out, “The annual budget of any one of the big conservative think tanks exceeds the combined budgets of all left-of-center think tanks combined.” Soley is particularly scornful of places like the Hoover Institution, which gets millions of dollars every year from Stanford University to host right-wing scholars who never teach, while routinely decrying the lapsed pedagogic standards of the PC academy.

Soley also argues that the corporate-driven research agenda of many universities is responsible for many of the more widely noted ills of American higher education: The university’s obsessive focus on research drives up tuition costs and diverts professors from their true role as teachers. Corporate correctness, not political correctness, is the threat he sees to intellectual inquiry.

As universities continue to be defunded in the public sphere, they will become more beholden to their corporate funders—and also more vulnerable to more nakedly ideological forms of corruption. After the University of Iowa hosted a recent gay studies conference, the state legislature passed a ban on using taxpayer funds to portray homosexuals in a positive light. Although the state senate voted down the measure, it cut the university’s funding by \$100,000.

Corruption like this represents the future of higher education in a time of tight budgets. And when the donors have ideological agendas to fund, any threats to academic standards will be overlooked for the sake of easy money. When billionaire Lee Bass publicly demanded the right to veto any teachers for the conservative Western Culture program he wanted to fund, Yale University returned his \$20 million donation. But few universities have an endowment like Yale’s and will find it much harder to avoid selling out academic freedom to the highest bidder.

Hamilton himself warns of “a future period of zealotry” in which the right will overreact and suppress the left. What Hamilton fails to realize is that we are going through this period of zealotry right now. In the backlash against “political correctness,” the Republicans are already succeeding at destroying cultural institutions such as the National Endowment for the Arts because they are perceived as leftist. The efforts to do the same thing to higher education, via state legislatures, alumni and corporate donors, will not be far behind. ◀

John K. Wilson is the editor of *Democratic Culture* and author of *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education* (Duke University Press).

FALLBOOKS



Out of the past

By Linda DeLibero

You couldn't blame a historian for being more than a tad skeptical—and envious—of the filmmaking business. In Hollywood, after all, history too often provides the excuse to stamp the same old narrative—forbidden love, good guys vs. bad—with the imprimatur of “truth.” Yet even when viewers know such history to be a crock, the visual image maintains the power to make suckers of us all: Witness the brouhaha over *JFK*, the outrageousness of whose lies was matched only by the public's willingness to take them seriously. And how many dry but well-meaning history lessons have been canceled out by the spectacle of Disney's *Pocahontas*, now emblazoned in millions of young minds as that busty little gal in the buckskin mini? It's enough to send any sober historian running safely back to the archives.

And run they do. The historical profession, as Robert Rosenstone wryly observes in *Visions of the Past*, is not known for its embrace of the new, the trendy or the popular, especially when those elements threaten to usurp the very role of the historian. Serious film scholarship has proliferated elsewhere in the humanities (notably in departments of English, comparative literature and American studies) for more than 20 years. But historians have until very recently either dismissed film or ignored it completely, perhaps in the hopes that it will just go away. In *Visions of the Past*, Rosenstone, a professor of history at the California Institute of Technology and a veteran of two film projects, warns his fellow historians that ignoring the powerful role film plays in shaping popular perceptions of the past is both perilous and foolhardy. Not only, he argues, has film co-opted the historian's job of telling “stories that matter,” but at its best it can provide the most viable means to a richer, more complex understanding of history itself.

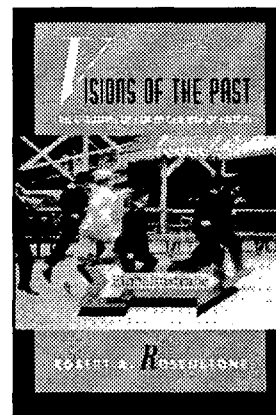
The book is a series of essays written over the past 10 years charting both Rosenstone's initial, uneasy encounters with historical film as well as his current stance as a champion of the medium—or, at least, of its experimental potential to tell history far more effectively than words can. Along the way, Rosenstone had two largely unsatisfactory collabora-

tions with filmmakers: One of his books, on the Spanish Civil War's Lincoln Brigade, led him to an advisory role on the documentary *The Good Fight*; another, a biography of the charismatic American communist John Reed, served as a source for Warren Beatty's *Reds*.

The latter encounter, documented in a chapter of *Visions of the Past*, was a particularly instructive lesson in Hollywood's way with history. Contrary to media reports that Beatty assiduously pursued historical truth in his chronicle of American radicalism, Rosenstone found him singularly uninterested in any fact that would impede the “flow” of his narrative. Indeed, *Reds* points up the problem with all popular historical films. The movie, ostensibly a brave and financially risky undertaking (a major film sympathetic to communists in the early '80s could hardly seem otherwise), was successful because it did what Hollywood films do best, muting controversial politics and the troubling complexities of history with charismatic stars and a rousing storyline. As Rosenstone notes, even Ronald Reagan liked *Reds*—proof that you can get a viewer to root for just about any cause, as long as your hero looks like Warren Beatty.

Of course, to anyone familiar with serious film scholarship, these complaints against Hollywood will not seem new. *Visions of the Past* is in large part a plea for historians to take film seriously, and so it argues passionately and insistently for notions that are long-accepted tenets of cinema studies: that films necessarily employ methods that cannot be measured for historical “accuracy” by traditional standards, that the language of film is not equivalent to the written word, that classical Hollywood narratives inevitably reduce complex history down to simple tales of individual lives.

But Rosenstone makes it clear in these essays—most of which were originally delivered before various historical associations—that he is a historian speaking to other historians, many of whom take films such as *Reds* as proof that movies inherently make bad history. This focus on his colleagues' concerns produces mixed results. On the one hand, Rosenstone displays his profession's healthy suspicion of theory, which renders *Visions of the Past* refreshingly free of the jargon that limits general



**Visions of the Past:
The Challenge of Film
to Our Idea of History**
By Robert A. Rosenstone
Harvard University Press
271 pp., \$16.95

access to most cinema scholarship. Examples—scarce commodities in most academic prose—abound here. Rosenstone's meticulous comparison of how history is put to use in *Glory* and *Mississippi Burning*, for example, is a blessedly clear explication of how film works differently—for good and bad—from the written word. However, that historian's perspective limits Rosenstone's ability to comment extensively on the larger issues that film inevitably raises. Bent on detailing the difference between film and fact, he neatly sidesteps a more difficult question: How much does all that fudging of facts matter to the filmgoing public? Does it make a difference if a whole generation of viewers has gotten its ideas about the 1960s from Oliver Stone? We live in a time when our Speaker of the House cites *Star Wars* as an example of the early space program's "spirit of adventure." It would seem prudent, in a book about history and film, to spell out the consequences of confusing fact and fiction, not merely for other historians, but for the public at large.

On issues of judgment, too, Rosenstone occasionally falls into a trap that film itself sets for "professional" moviegoers, i.e., scholars and critics: the predisposition to favor films that tell their tales in a sophisticated style, or that display the "right" politics. Why else would Rosenstone dismiss *Mississippi Burning* as "bad history," whereas the equally offensive *JFK* is, in his judgment, "among the most important works of American history ever to appear on the screen"? Both films are pure propaganda, but Stone's movie had a message liberals found much easier to entertain, not to mention a lot of hip, MTV-style montage.

These same questions of perspective plague the second half of *Visions of the Past*, which Rosenstone devotes to what he calls the "experimental history" of independent and Third World filmmakers such as Jill Godmilow (*Far From Poland*), Chris Marker (*The Koumiko Mystery*, *Sans Soleil*, *A.K.*) and Ousmane Sembene (*Black Girl*, *Xala*, *Ceddo*). Again, these names comprise a familiar A-list of directors within the field of cinema studies, but Rosenstone's worthy purpose is to introduce them to historians as an alternative to written New Historicism, touted in recent years as the histor-



ical profession's answer to postmodernism. As Rosenstone correctly points out, beyond the usual suspects (Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Carlo Ginzburg), there isn't a whole lot of truly "new" history going on, and what there is hardly constitutes a breakthrough for historical thinking. So far, very few historians have dared play with narrative form or literary invention, and if they do, they'll get kicked in the teeth by Gertrude Himmelfarb.

But a truly innovative form of history can, indeed, be found in the works of independent directors such as those Rosenstone singles out for praise. Used imaginatively, visual media can collapse time, juxtapose historical periods, interrogate the very process of history-making itself in a concrete, literal way that words simply can't match. Films such as Marker's *Sans Soleil* and Sembene's *Ceddo* are provocative and exciting, not least because they point up just how much all Western experience has been ineluctably altered by the visual image. In *Sans Soleil*, for example, a futuristic machine called the Zone turns scenes of destruction into beautiful images, pointing up the illusory nature of all "screened" history.

The question is—and it's a question Rosenstone barely raises, perhaps because the answers are so grim—who will see these films? Rosenstone wants fellow historians to see them, apparently to prove to them that film is not an inherently reactionary form of narrative. That's nice, but it won't change the fact that, now more than ever, most of us are pretty much stuck with the reactionary stuff.

How do you create a larger audience for "difficult" films? How do you get people to like what's "good" for them? Whose role is it to do that anyway? And where, in a culture increasingly dominated by media monopolies, can you find truly independent films in the first place? It's not elitist to suggest that the average viewer, accustomed to Dream Factory productions, needs to be educated to the pleasures of such films; and that doing so requires changing the very way we think of movies, not to mention that more insidious beast, television. A book on film and history should, it seems, say something about this task and the hard questions that go with it. But by addressing his book chiefly to historians, Rosenstone significantly lowers the stakes, and thus the importance, of his project. The call in *Visions of the Past* is for other members of the historical profession to use film as a means for creating new and challenging versions of the past. But if there's no one out there to see those films, we can all look forward to the triumphant reign of Walt Disney as our country's chief historian.

Linda DeLibero is a freelance writer based in Baltimore.

FALLBOOKS



Damned nation

By Ilan Stavans

António Lobo Antunes, one of Portugal's most prestigious men of letters, is obsessed with damnation. His characters find themselves trapped in circumstances beyond their control, condemned to tormented, earthly existences they cannot escape. Typically, they begin by living normal, happy lives in Lisbon and the Iberian countryside. Lobo Antunes renders their actions and speech in sober, realistic terms—that is, until politics take over, and happiness turns into nightmare. Suddenly, they are forced to accept that their lives are controlled by the blind forces of revolution and nationalism that have given a tragic cast to Portugal's political life; they are mere marionettes in the theater of the damned.

It's a theme that has kept Lobo Antunes returning to the most critical interval in modern Portuguese history, the early 1970s. After more than 35 years of the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, Portugal underwent a bloodless coup in 1974, which ushered in a parliamentary government that listed toward Christian-Democratic centrism. Foreign affairs at the time were at least as turbulent. The former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique fell to national independence movements in 1975, only to settle into their own long and bloody civil wars.

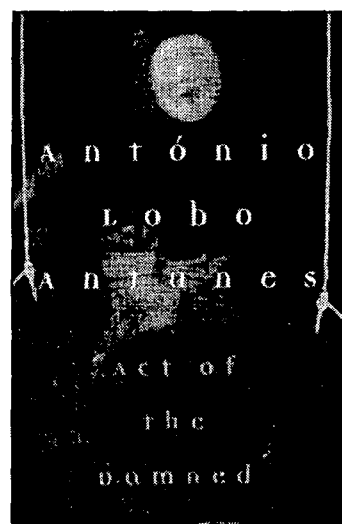
Lobo Antunes renders these many political convulsions in an intimate, and often confessional, style. Trained as a psychiatrist (he still maintains a part-time practice), Lobo Antunes also knows the political disquiet of modern Portugal first-hand: He served more than two years as a medic during the African colonial wars, where, as he once put it, he "would escape the horror by reading Lewis Carroll."

His first international success was his second novel, *South of Nowhere*, an autobiographical tale structured as a one-sided conversation at a Lisbon bar. The encounter,

punctuated by frequent drinks and frightening disclosures, takes place between a nameless woman and a soldier, one of 50,000 who had been stationed in Angola to uphold colonial rule. The narrator explains the bewilderment of his passage into postcolonial Portuguese life by recalling his battalion's tour of duty: "Twenty-seven months of anguish and death in Juda's asshole, in the sands of the East, the roads to Quinocos and in the sunflower fields of Cassanje, we felt the same homesickness, the same shit. Felt the same fear, and we parted in five minutes, a handshake, a slap on the shoulder, a feeble embrace, we walked away from each other, bent over the weight of our baggage, through the guard gate, vanishing into the whirlwind of [this] city."

The troublesome, decade-long military involvement of Portugal in Africa—which forced the country to come to terms with its ancient colonial impulse and turned it into a more inward-looking, contemplative nation—is in fact at the core of Lobo Antunes' entire work. His handling of the postcolonial experience, indeed, bears a striking resemblance to recent American fiction about U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Mozambique, where Portugal sent some 60,000 troops to combat a liberation front, is the subject of *Fado Alexandrino*, beautifully translated into English in 1990 by Gregory Rabassa. Here, too, Lobo Antunes' characters describe the life facing them on the home front in bitter terms of confinement and historical obsolescence. "Understand," one of them remarks, "I am a man from a narrow old country, from a stifling city shimmering in the reflections of its tile façades. ... I was born and raised in a dwarfed crochet universe."

This perspective affords a striking contrast with the work of Portugal's other leading writer, José Saramago. Saramago's novels, including *Baltasar and Blimunda*, *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* and *The Stone Raft*, use real historical characters, from royalty to Portuguese men of letters, to ponder the religious, cultural, ideological and economic issues



Act of the Damned
By António Lobo Antunes
Translated by Richard Zenith
Grove /Atlantic
246 pp., \$22

shaping the nation's history. Lobo Antunes, meanwhile, shies away from grand historical mosaics.

Lobo Antunes' vision of postcolonial life in Portugal is, instead, steeped in a sense of inner constriction. He deciphers the Portuguese domestic psyche through the lives of common, unremarkable men and women who find themselves swept away and alienated from their own country's interests. These are the dramas at the heart of novels such as *An Explanation of the Birds* (translated into English in 1991), a Faulknerian experiment in first- and third-person narration weaving in and through the disenchantments of latter-day Lisbon. And in *Act of the Damned*, written in 1985 and finally available to American readers in a translation by Richard Zenith, Lobo Antunes has arrived at a tour de force and a tragicomedy of enormous literary power.

Once again we find ourselves in the mid-'70s—in a moment known as “the revolution of the flowers”—shortly after the coup that replaced Marcelo Caetano, Salazar's appointed successor, and inaugurated a fragile period of political balance. Marxist, Leninist and Maoist chants can be heard in the streets. The focus is on a greedy family, once wealthy and eminent, whose fortune and reputation have dwindled. As the revolutionary coup unfolds, the narrator, Dr. Nuno Souza, a dentist whose personal identity seems constantly in flux as the narrative point of view changes, finds out his father-in-law, the source of the family's fortune, is dying. Souza immediately moves to gain control of the wealth in a once-secure countryside stronghold, Monsaraz, in Portugal's Alentejo region. The family's final dissolution becomes apparent as it is forced to cross the border into Spain, leaving the country.

Lobo Antunes' gift for satire, always a quiet strength of his writing, is quite evident here. Souza is at once sarcastic in recounting his situation and pathetically shortsighted in choosing a course of action. He repeatedly fails to perceive himself a step above the conflict that imprisons him and succumbs to the blindness of an insatiable appetite for authoritarian control.

The disorienting polyphonic narrative structure of *Act of the Damned* at times surpasses that of *An Explanation of the Birds*. Here the shifting voices and viewpoints create a gathering of multiple, distorted images not unlike that in a house of mirrors. Lobo Antunes' objective, of course, is to contrast the socialist hopes and doctrinaire spirit sweeping Portugal less than a decade after Salazar's tyranny with the collective vision of a comfortable yet crumbling ruling class never

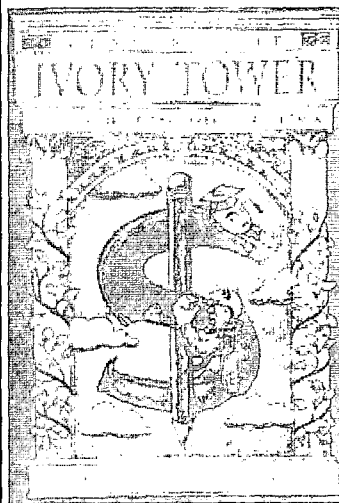
ready to embrace a socialist future.

The work of Lobo Antunes—with its rich constellation of characters (including a retarded sister, a simpleminded brother and a bunch of fearsome dogs that come to symbolize the family estate) and many illicit sexual liaisons between family members—shares an odd affinity with the tensions of family and society chronicled in the great works of Italian cinema, such as Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* and Vittorio De Sica's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*. And like these directors, Lobo Antunes is a poet of bourgeois decadence. In *Act of the Damned*, for example, Souza is a self-proclaimed Richard III who falls victim to his own dictatorial ambition; as history closes in around him, he becomes a bourgeois type of the tragic hero fighting to regain control of his life.

The novel has a style, both in theme and in texture, that may strike many readers as old-fashioned. But even if this is so, Lobo Antunes' literary relevance lies elsewhere—in tackling the Portuguese experience in miniature, as it were, and from the bottom up; in making us understand its violent 20th century as a stage of chaos, repression and redemption; and most of all by focusing on humble, imperfect creatures damned by distant nationalistic goals and domestic ideological tensions.

Ilan Stavans, a novelist and critic, teaches at Amherst College. His latest books are *Bandido* (HarperCollins) and, forthcoming, *The One-Handed Pianist and Other Stories* (University of New Mexico Press). He is currently editing *The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays*.

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FALLBOOKS



Just the facts, ambassador

By Phillip Smith

Throughout the 1980s, American activists and media critics alike bitterly condemned media coverage of the bloody civil war in El Salvador, decrying both the press's chronic failure to question the politically motivated statements of U.S. Embassy officials and more acute episodes of kowtowing to power. The *New York Times*' demotion of correspondent Raymond Bonner for stories critical of Ronald Reagan's Central American policies was the most notorious case, but certainly not the only one. With few such exceptions, critics charged, the press corps seemed unable to tell the truth about El Salvador.

Ten years down the road, that truth seems starkly simple: From 1980 to 1988, the Reagan administration poured billions of dollars into El Salvador to prop up a military government guilty of gross human rights violations. When a broad-based, armed revolutionary movement emerged, the United States resorted to everything short of invasion to forestall its victory. In the end, American intervention beat back the movement for social justice and left the existing order essentially intact. It also prolonged the bloodshed and tacitly condoned murder and massacre perpetrated by the Salvadoran army.

In 1990, after Reagan but before the 1992 Salvadoran peace accord, anthropologist and author Mark Pedelty spent several months "in the field" with the members of the foreign press corps in San Salvador. Pedelty, who believed American journalists on the scene had been fully aware of the United States' role in the war, traveled to El Salvador with a simple question: If correspondents knew what was going on, why didn't they tell us? The answer to that question forms the heart of *War Stories*.

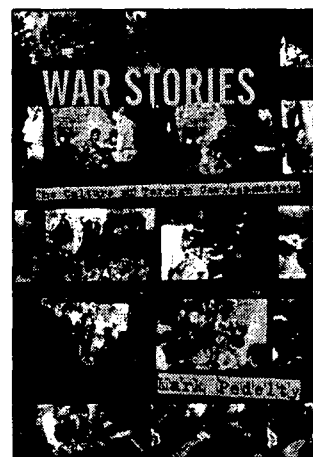
Informed by theory, but not overwhelmed by it, *War Stories* is more than an illuminating case study. To the reader's benefit, Pedelty forgoes the academic exoticism that makes much social science inaccessible to all but initiates. Without excessive wallowing, he acknowledges his theoretical debts, in particular to the work of Michel Foucault. Then, in one

of the most fruitful efforts to apply the obscurantist philosopher's concepts to real-world social and political institutions, he weds Foucault's notion of "discipline" with Louis Althusser's concept of "ideological state apparatuses." Out of this marriage emerges Pedelty's defining theoretical concept of "disciplinary apparatuses," essentially hierarchies of control and specialization that shape the foreign correspondent's work. The influences of institutional forces such as the corporate media, the Salvadoran dictatorship and U.S. foreign policy bureaucracies are perhaps obvious. Pedelty's greater achievement, however, lies in his investigation of the of the complex motivations, noble as well as craven, that drive foreign correspondents.

War Stories dedicates at least a chapter to the role played by each set of constraints in determining what is written and, more importantly, published. Pedelty's analysis of the American Embassy's influence over war coverage, for instance, requires a full two chapters. Pedelty's argument is straightforward: Neither naive nor lazy, foreign correspondents are squeezed between editors who demand official quotes and diplomats who simply refuse to speak to journalists not willing to toe the embassy line. The result, as one interviewee explains, is that "[j]ournalists start to get in bed with their sources. They have to start treating them in a respectful and non-confrontational manner to keep them." Unsurprisingly, Pedelty argues, statements gleaned via this budding-up process tend to serve the ends of the U.S. government's position, not accurate reporting.

Although neither editorial pressure nor obfuscation by American government officials is groundbreaking news, Pedelty nonetheless deserves credit for his nuanced description of how power shaped the news from El Salvador. And his insightful treatment of other "disciplinary apparatuses" moves his analysis beyond both vulgar theories of repression and censorship and the "corporate media" thesis provided by media critics such as Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman.

Even more impressive, however, is the way Pedelty seamlessly weaves academic theories into descriptions of the daily lives of foreign correspondents. Most media criticism ignores the nuts and bolts of the reporter's labor,



War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents
By Mark Pedelty
Routledge
254 pp., \$16.95

but Pedelty the anthropologist revels in documentary details. For when all is said and done, war reporting is highly structured and disciplined work. Correspondents must sell their output, please their editors, make their deadlines.

Doing what all good ethnographers do (living, working and playing among his subjects, but most of all, observing them), Pedelty interviewed some 40 newspeople, ranging from well-paid American staff reporters to hardscrabble stringers and, at the bottom of the press pecking order, Salvadoran reporters who worked for the gringos. His research uncovered some surprising particulars. Early on, Pedelty felt he was missing out by not going into the field with the reporters; it was some time before he realized that they usually weren't in the field themselves. In fact, only rarely did the Salvadoran correspondents do what most people consider the war correspondent's defining function, battlefield reporting. Their beats primarily led them along the well-worn path connecting a handful of sources, including the embassy, the Salvadoran government and military press offices, and the Camino Real Hotel, where reporters gathered in their offices, listened to FMLN and commercial radio broadcasts, wrote their stories and drank together at the bar.

Such stories go a long way toward dispelling the myth of the war correspondent as the rugged, fearless, womanizing individualist in the mold of Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell. As Pedelty demonstrates, reality is not so glamorous. But myth has its purposes, and for the foreign press corps in El Salvador, the idea of the maverick correspondent made bearable the mundane reality of structured, disciplined work. But especially among young men in the process of creating themselves, this self-mythologizing sometimes takes on a more callow and callous aspect. As one woman correspondent told Pedelty, "There is an attitude among a good amount of men that this war is their personal form of entertainment." One doesn't have to look too deeply to see the ugliness in the image of a hero-correspondent who, awash in violence, sees in his situation primarily the chance to be the next Hemingway—or at least to have an excellent adventure.

Pedelty's vision grows cloudier when he takes up the question of how foreign reporting might be improved. Given his compelling portrait of the powers shaping foreign dispatches, his least successful argument is that the main-



stream media may begin to publish more forthright accounts of U.S. interests in conflicts abroad. Particularly weak is his suggestion that alternative press services such as Inter Press and the Salvadoran Press Agency expand their reach into the rigidly institutionalized establishment press. An approach with more potential, however, is Pedelty's suggestion that large and medium-sized papers hire reporter-specialists with thematic beats such as international politics, human rights or the environment. Although this proposal might perpetuate a form of parachute journalism, in which reporters unfamiliar with a given geographic region or political situation jet in, then out, such correspondents would not be hamstrung by the need to curry embassy favor. Pedelty argues that these reporter-specialists, combined with wire-service stringers to report breaking news and resident reporters to provide local perspective, could fashion a new and vastly improved model of foreign reporting.

Philip Smith is associate editor of *CovertAction Quarterly*. He reported from El Salvador on several occasions in the 1980s.

FALL BOOKS

Drum rap

By Chris Rasmussen

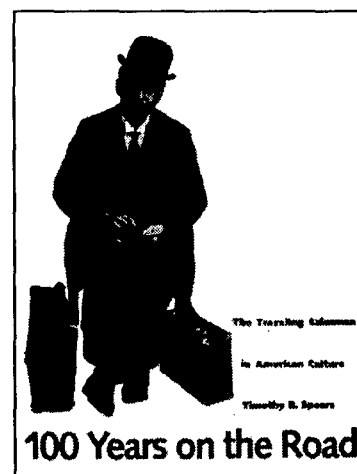
Between 1870 and 1925, traveling salesmen were ubiquitous not only in the nation's cities and towns, but in its literature and its imagination. These salesmen, poised somewhere between retailers and manufacturers, were especially useful to Americans reckoning with the steady erosion of the face-to-face, small-town business culture under the growth of an impersonal, national market. Timothy Spears has uncovered the remarkable history of traveling salesmen and their significance in American culture by examining not only the careers of actual salesmen, but, more significantly, their image in literature and in American culture generally. This emphasis is welcome: We want to know not "What did salesmen do?" but "What did salesmen mean?"

Scholars commonly say that 20th-century Americans live in a consumer culture. In recent years, countless books have been written about department stores, advertising and other pillars of this culture. Thus far, much of what we know about the "culture of consumption" concerns the store owners, advertisers, economists and others who presided over its advent. *100 Years on the Road* concentrates instead on the more everyday culture of these "quintessential middlemen" who shuttled from town to town in order to link manufacturers and their far-flung retailers. Spears has dredged up a wealth of remarkable sources, primarily from literature and trade publications such as salesmanship manuals, and his book is amply illustrated with photographs and drawings of salesmen, both real and imagined.

Let the reader beware: Fascinating as it is, Spears' book is written for a relatively small audience of scholars and will not be light reading even for them. Imagine it is 1890, and you are seated aboard a Pullman car en route from Chicago to Omaha. You strike up a conversation with a traveling salesman who seems somewhat torn between his career on the road and the solaces of home. You think to yourself, "This bifurcated image is a metaphorical figure for a fluid, emotional matrix, which the salesman had always to negotiate." You offer the salesman a cigarette, and ask him what it's like to

transact business within "a dramatic field that is both depthless and fragmented." He politely mumbles something about having to support his family, then buries his nose in his account book, pointedly declining to speak to you for the rest of the journey.

Such thickets of jargon notwithstanding, Spears' story is simple: In the decades after the Civil War, an army of "drummers" fanned out from America's cities to spread the products of the nation's industries throughout the hinterland. Charged to "drum up" business, these itinerant salesmen took to "the road" to mediate between a decentralized network of small towns and small businesses and the world of industrial enterprise. The successful drummer had to be able to adapt his persona to a host of clients and situations; in the words of one contemporary critic, he had to



100 Years on the Road:
The Traveling Salesman
in American Culture
 By Timothy B. Spears
 Yale University Press
 320 pp., \$35



become “all things to all men, in order to gain some.” Transient and dependent on their “improvisational selfhood” for their livelihood, these salesmen soon gained a reputation for congeniality—and for story-telling, drinking and womanizing.

Ironically, drummers undercut their own importance within the commercial economy. These middlemen were truly “caught in the middle,” as Spears puts it, squeezed between the interests of their clients and their employers. They logged thousands of miles in order to build the market for those employers’ products, only to find their own autonomy diminished by the large-scale enterprises that they helped create. In the early 20th century, the storied life of the drummer became an object of nostalgia, as businesses sought to clean up the reputation of their sales personnel and to subject salesmen to the same rigors of “scientific management” that had wrung greater productivity from factory workers. Salesmen, who had formerly enjoyed a considerable degree of freedom as the high-spirited denizens of the road, were now subjected to the scrutiny of their sales manager and compelled to heed the dictates of the parent company. No longer suspended uneasily between the small business and the large corporation, the once-colorful traveling salesman became nondescript, the very embodiment of the regimentation enforced by corporate capitalism.

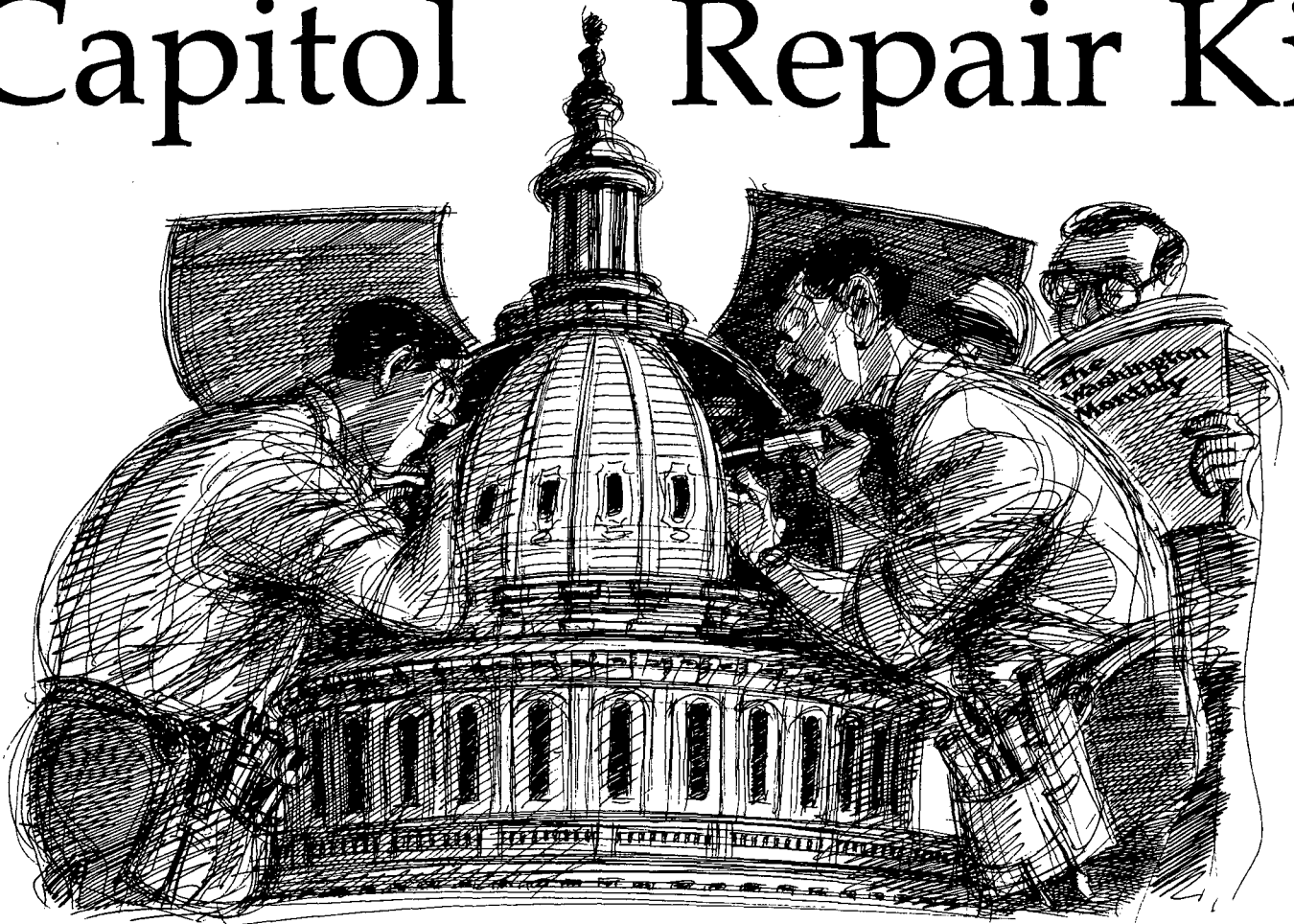
But Spears likely overstates his case for the cleanup of salesmanship practices, as though the drummer was swept away by the modern salesman overnight. In fact, more than a few descendants of those paleo-businessmen survive. Drummers, as Spears observes, contributed mightily to the creation

of a squalid, all-male business culture, one that lives on in the hijinks at business conventions, the almost unbelievably foul talk on the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange, and, for that matter, in offices throughout the land.

Even more significant than the drummers’ influence on modern business decorum was their indispensable role in transforming broader American culture. By lending a human face to the forces of mass production, Spears argues, salesmen helped “domesticate” the newly bewildering American economy. Further, they helped domesticate the new economy in a more profound, troubling sense. In the 20th century, salesmanship, formerly a calling that occasioned at least a little distrust, became an almost universal habit of mind, one that could be applied to virtually any endeavor in which one person sought to manipulate the psyche or enlist the assent of another, a view expressed most notably in Dale Carnegie’s wildly successful *How To Win Friends and Influence People* (1936). The salesman’s protean personality, his ability to become “all things to all men,” was no longer restricted to the trader’s world, but now could be practiced with an untroubled conscience by all. That the modern American economy has made us a nation of consumers should come as no surprise; that it has transformed us into a nation of salesmen, however, remains unsettling. In mapping out the changing role of the traveling salesman in America’s economy and its culture, Spears has told us a good deal not only about where we are, but about the road that brought us here.

Chris Rasmussen is a professor of history at the University of Vermont.

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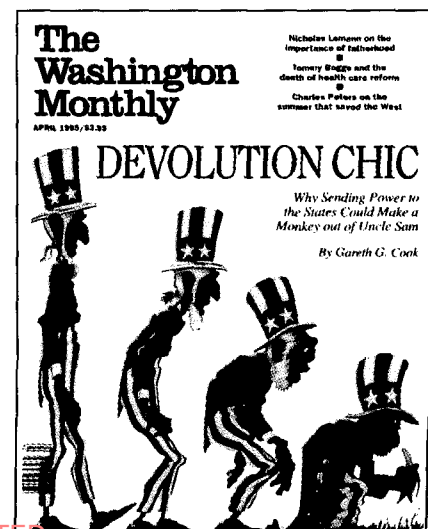
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FALLBOOKS



Democracy's doldrums

By George Scialabba

In the blighted environment of contemporary political debate, historical understanding is an endangered species. "Democracy," for example, occupies a pre-eminent place in the American political vocabulary. Yet the notion that democracy has not by any means looked, felt or been conceived the same way in all phases of American history, and that something invaluable has been lost—perhaps permanently lost—on the way to the present, is entirely foreign to both popular and elite consciousness. The historian Robert Wiebe—the author of two influential syntheses of 19th-century American history, *The Opening of American Society* and *The Search for Order*—has written a book that aims to bring these notions home. *Self-Rule* charts—and explains—the vicissitudes of popular government in America since the 18th century. Descriptively and analytically, Wiebe's book is a brilliant success; in drawing a moral from the story, less so.

According to Wiebe, the American Revolution did not establish, or even seek to establish, a full-fledged democracy. "To the Revolutionary generation," he writes, "democracy was a minor matter." Large landowners, merchants and bankers dominated the economy; dependent labor, including indentured servitude, was widespread. Deference and hierarchy remained the rule politically and morally. A change in sovereignty had not been accompanied by a change in social structure or political culture.

The first half of the 19th century did, however, see a radical change. The country's westward expansion entailed that many a local polity and economy be created from scratch. A chronic labor shortage and an abundance of

available land made economic independence possible for virtually all white men. The result of this unprecedented degree of economic self-determination was an unprecedented degree of civic equality and political participation. Government was small; taxes were low; elections were frequent; campaigns were vigorous; oratory was abundant; parades and rallies were numerous and boisterous; and turnout was high. Political lodges and clubs were ubiquitous; nearly all white men were affiliated with one or another of them.

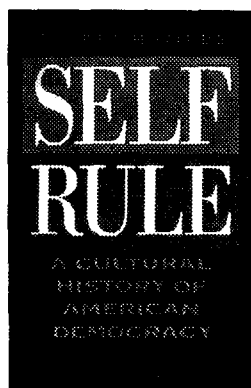
It all sounds gloriously alive and colorful, at least in Wiebe's account. Of course, women and blacks were outside the charmed circle. But among white men—even immigrants, for the most part—the political process was astonishingly open and inclusive. The class divisions and social hierarchies of the revolutionary era were notably absent; and manners were unconstrained and egalitarian to a degree that dumbfounded European visitors.

Then, roughly between 1890 and 1920, twin blows fell on "the old collective hurly-burly" of 19th-century democracy, from which it never recovered: the closing of the frontier and the concentration of capital. New land had always underwritten American economic individualism; it was bound to run out eventually, and, by the end of the 19th century, it did. But even more important was "an interrelated set of changes in the meaning of work and the sources of authority," Wiebe writes. "With what was customarily called industrialization," he argues,

came hierarchies that sharpened invidious distinctions, especially by differentiating people's work, and sought out ways to regiment subordination, sometimes through government and sometimes outside of it: more differences to measure, more rules to issue, more rules to follow. Everybody belonged, everybody had a place. Whose rules determined whose prospects in these hierarchies expressed the broadest of all changes accompanying industrialization: changes in class structure.

Wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers increased, and status differences multiplied. Unemployment remained high after the depressions and panics of the 1890s, especially for the unskilled. Employer violence escalated, aided by a judiciary hostile to labor militancy. The defeat of the Populists and the Knights of Labor had far-reaching effects: the demoralization of farmers and workers, and the consolidation of power by an aroused, class-conscious corporate elite, newly aware of the importance of controlling both public opinion and the state agencies of surveillance—lessons it has never forgotten.

The work process was intensively rationalized, segmented and supervised; a cult of "efficiency" and "expertise" justified ever-increasing managerial control. As a cultural



Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy

By Robert H. Wiebe
University of Chicago Press
321 pp., \$25.95

parallel to the growth of differentiation and hierarchy in industry, an ethos of "respectability" enforced attention to new, nationally advertised standards in consumption as well as behavior. A fortunate stratum of labor—tool and dye workers, machinists, steamfitters and others—achieved respectability; the rest joined blacks, women, and the newer Southern and Eastern European immigrants in a lower class whose economic and political fortunes waned in the early 20th century.

At the same time the lower class was sinking, Wiebe argues, two classes were taking shape above it. Industrial and financial consolidation produced a national managerial class distributed among the big cities. Centered in transportation, steel, chemicals, finance and other concentrated industries, this class was distinct from the local middle class found in agriculture, retail and real estate. Their spheres of governmental influence were different: The local middle class "did better at the state than at the national level, in the House of Representatives than in the Senate, with Congress than in the executive branch, with the federal executive than with the federal judiciary." Culturally, there was a similar divide, between the secular, cosmopolitan ethos of the urban elites, with their preference for professional credentials and impersonal expertise, and the local middle class's affinity for religious and geographical rootedness and face-to-face transactions. The national class established national bar, medical and banking associations; the local middle class gathered in fraternal organizations such as the Lions, Elks and Rotary clubs.

This "three-class" model does a good deal of explanatory work for Wiebe, particularly in his account of "the compromise of the 1930s," in which national class and traditional middle-class leaders "traded support and reaffirmed realms of authority. National government would increase its economic assistance for local America; local politicians would remain loyal to the existing national parties. Members of the national class would set broad economic policy; members of the local middle class would set the rules in their own localities, including many of the decisions about how federal monies would be allocated." In Wiebe's account, this serves as an illuminating approach to the New Deal and to the interest-group politics of the postwar period. As he points

out, the Tennessee Valley Authority, farm supports, unemployment relief and virtually all other nationally conceived and nationally funded programs had to accommodate to the local political topography. (Of course, it was the local elites, or "grass tops," rather than the lower class, or grass roots, who set the rules for local participation in national programs.) The national/local division was reflected in the Republican Party of the 1950s as well, in the *modus vivendi* between Eisenhower supporters and Taft supporters.

Wiebe's overriding interest is in identifying a change in the character of American democracy over the last two centuries. For this purpose, he develops a suggestive contrast between "self-determination," the guiding principle of 19th-century democracy, and "fulfillment," that of 20th-century democracy. The vast, unprecedented scale of both the economy and the state induced feelings of boundless possibility and, at the same time, of vulnerability and insignificance. The quality of American individualism changed, from the assertive, outward-turning, gregarious 19th-century norm to a more socially and psychologically sophisticated but often more isolated and ambivalent self.

The political upshot of this new individualism was a new relation between the citizen and the state, a change from "the People governing" to "people being governed." Many Americans were driven to look for a greater sense of community from the same federal government they blamed for rendering them isolated and threatened. Nineteenth-century American politics was, above all, an arena of group affirmation, in which associated white males competed for control of a relatively small and pliable government. The 20th century produced a new emphasis on defending the individual's precarious autonomy against the corporate and governmental Leviathan, on the one hand, and local prejudices, on the other. A new emphasis, that is, on rights—or as Wiebe provocatively puts it, on "individual rights without political competition."

This last formulation is meant as a friendly admonition to the left and brings the contemporary relevance of the book into focus. Wiebe is a subtle and judicious scholar, interested above all in historical understanding; but he is nonetheless a partisan, plainly aggrieved by the passing of the active, self-confident, face-to-face popular politics of 19th-century America. The left's focus in recent years on winning rights through litigation and regulation rather than legislation, Wiebe hints, signifies a lack of faith in the majoritarianism whose robust 19th-century version he has so vividly and affectionately recreated here.

It is a reasonable misgiving, an honorable grief; but, it would seem, unavailing for all that. Like the late, deeply lamented Christopher Lasch, Wiebe provides an attractive portrait of American democracy before the fall—before industrialization and political centralization—and a plausible account of how it was undermined. What he fails to do—again like Lasch—is provide any reason to believe that this historic defeat can be reversed.

George Scialabba, a freelance writer, lives in Cambridge, Mass.

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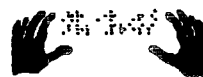
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Continued from page 56

cles and books about her), but the full cluster of ideas illuminated by her career can best be shown in a film like Solberg's. It takes a multimedia form—which is what a film, with its movie clips, snapshots, documents, narration and interviews, ultimately is—to catch a multimedia phenomenon, which is what Miranda and other stars are, especially today. Solberg moves seamlessly from naive personal reveries about Miranda the movie idol to deeply serious meditations on the way she transformed the dark-skinned culture of Latin America into a white novelty act palatable to racist America. The film's occasional clumsiness in re-enacting scenes from Miranda's life—her arrival in the United States, her death alone—seems a minor flaw beside Solberg's audacity in using film itself to think about what a filmed life meant not only to Carmen Miranda herself but to those who consumed her image.

There's another thing that Carmen Miranda and Michael Moore have in common: They've both worked for the same company, Twentieth Century Fox. But the studio that once exploited Miranda's immigrant image is now owned by another immigrant—though not exactly one of the huddled masses. Australian expatriate and global media baron Rupert Murdoch has expanded Fox into television, and Michael Moore is one of the unlikeliest beneficiaries of the new venture. Murdoch's successful bid to create a fourth television network has led to the appearance of all sorts of unexpected flowerings on the TV dial—the late black comedy show *In Living Color*, *The Simpsons*, *The X-Files*—and some real poison ivy, too, such as *Married with Children*. As long as it's scrambling to draw viewers from ABC, CBS and NBC, Fox will continue to experiment, which explains, I suppose, why the network picked up Moore's busy little newsmagazine *TV Nation*—the closest thing to a leftist perspective to be seen anywhere on network television.

On a recent Friday night Moore hosted *TV Nation*'s "love night," the most pleasing example yet of the show's transcendent cheekiness. One segment found him assaulting a Klan rally with displays of public affection, such as a mariachi band that serenaded the hooded ones while they were busy denouncing Phil Gramm for being married to an Asian woman. A line of winsome black cheerleaders called for love to reign, and a white woman wearing something like a portable kissing booth could be seen chasing a grand dragon, who couldn't get away fast enough.

TV Nation is conceptual art, delivering a half-dozen tiny political epiphanies a week. It challenges the viewer's presumptions about what television is and about what kind of contact is permissible with our fellow citizens and government and corporate entities. On a recent Washington outing, Moore marched into various congressional hideaways trying to get the same privileges as Newt and the boys. As he was turned away from the close-in parking reserved for representatives and senators at Washington's National Airport, he protested in the name of the Contract with America, which

promised to make Congress subject to the laws that apply to the average citizen. He just stretched the concept a bit.

In his standard segment, Moore marches into some corporate office tower and gets thrown out by earnest security guards and low-level management henchmen. It's the

peremptory rejection of any communication that is the telling moment in these encounters. Over and over again, Moore implicitly emphasizes that American society is, despite the friendly public-relations sheen, a society in which most institutions and businesses are essentially closed to all but the most narrowly formatted contact.

Of course, social conventions were even more stifling in Miranda's day. Whatever desire she had to spread the cultural wealth of Brazil was smothered by the commercial necessity to conduct business as usual, in both Washington and Hollywood.

The illusion of Miranda's happy, daffy, broken-English Hispanic was as useful then as its more overtly negative replacement, the illegal domestic worker, is now.

Today, we may have *Cosby Show* reruns, along with a few multicultural commercials, to ease our collective conscience. But commercial necessity still imposes its heavy constraints—even on *TV Nation*.

In a recent man-on-the-street segment taped in Chicago, a scruffy youth was seen saying, "...corporation pays Michael Jordan more than all its Indonesian workers." The youth who appeared in the segment told *In These Times* that the word preceding "corporation"—which had been edited out for the broadcast—was "Nike," the multibillion-dollar sneaker-maker whose advertising dollars are no doubt dear to Fox executives.

Given the delicate sensibilities of network censors, one wonders how long *TV Nation* can continue its scathing segments on corporate crime. In fact, one fears for its very existence. (As *In These Times* went to press, Fox was expected to announce whether the show would be canceled or extended, according to a message on *TV Nation*'s Web site, which is <http://cons2.sel.sony.com./tvn>.) It would be a shame if it disappeared, for it's one of the few truly unpredictable items in the media marketplace. *TV Nation* makes you laugh and then, like Helena Solberg's movie, it provokes anger and dismay as it exposes society's lies and distortions. Ultimately, however, both *Moore* and *Miranda* make a more important point: They show that the same media that have transported us to this dreamland can and must be used to get us out. ◀



TV Nation and the banana republic

By Pat Dowell

What does Carmen Miranda have to do with Michael Moore? Whether I'm channel-surfing on the couch at home or slouching toward the local multiplex, both remind me of what's missing from my daily viewing experience. Almost nowhere in the commercial froth of television—and certainly nowhere in the glitzy theme park of "event movies"—is there anyone who confronts the fact that our society has descended into a dream world dominated by celebrity-obsessed tabloid news shows.

But Carmen Miranda and Michael Moore both illustrate how moving images themselves—the vessel of our demise—can be used to chart a way out of the morass. Actually, it's not Miranda herself, the "Brazilian bombshell" of so many 1940s Hollywood musicals, who shows the way. Rather it's a 90-minute documentary-cum-essay about the fruit-topped singer and camp icon that provides a wealth of cultural and political lessons. The unusual new film, called *Carmen Miranda: Bananas Is My Business*, was written and directed by Helena Solberg, a Brazilian who's lived in the United States for many years and has made polemical documentaries about women, politics and American foreign policy. (*Carmen Miranda* has been playing in a few major-market theaters and will be broadcast on PBS's *P.O.V.* October 6.)

The film mixes Solberg's personal reminiscences of what Miranda meant to her with archival footage, interviews with those who knew Miranda and stylized re-enactments of moments in the performer's life. *Carmen Miranda* is the kind of film that seemed unthinkable until the late '80s, when documentary underwent a sea-change, shifting to a more personal presentation of reality. The move was led by Ross McElwee (*Sherman's March*, 1986), Errol Morris (*The Thin Blue Line*, 1988) and, perhaps most successfully, Michael Moore, who made a big splash as director of the 1989 film *Roger & Me*. The ousted *Mother Jones* editor took himself and a camera crew riffing through the civic debris of Flint, Mich. Arriving in the wake of the auto industry's decade-long downsizing efforts, Moore created a smart-ass essay on the accountability, or rather lack thereof, of giant corporations like General Motors. The chief narrative thread was Moore's personal pursuit of GM chairman Roger Smith.

Lately, Moore's been busy on television with a weirdly wonderful mock-magazine show called *TV Nation*. It consists of several small-scale provocations built on the *Roger & Me* model, packed into one hour each week. What Moore does is stage hit-and-run attacks on the media protocols of American society.

In her documentary on Miranda, Solberg launches a

more sustained assault on the American psyche. Using Miranda's career as her staging ground, Solberg explores our relentless quest for the easiest way of thinking (and so, *not* thinking) about culture and politics. Miranda was Brazil's biggest radio star in the '30s and was considered, as the film points out, the greatest interpreter ever of Brazilian popular music. In 1939, she first donned her spangled, exaggerated version of the Afro-Brazilian costume of Bahia, with its fruit-basket turban, bare-midriff top and ruffled slit skirt. That same year American impresario Lee Shubert, fascinat-



ed by Miranda's sensational nightclub act in Rio, scooped her up for Broadway. Hollywood came along the next year, and FDR's administration recruited her in 1942 to promote the United States' good-neighbor policy with South America during World War II.

The tutti-frutti straitjacket took its toll on Miranda's career. She grew to resent her role, and so did Brazilians. Miranda remained wildly popular as the country's most famous export, but she became an object of scorn as well, with the press claiming she had been Americanized. By 1950, the American public grew tired of her unchanging image, but she and her employers could think of nothing else for her to do. She died of a heart attack in 1955, and bananas, as she once reminded her audience, were still her business.

Miranda's sad story could be written (and there have been arti-

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